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THE WORKS OF GEORGE MEREDITH

MEMORIAL EDITION

VOLUME

XVIII

"Her mind was away, one might guess."

CHAP. 4

GEORGE MEREDITH

LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA

A NOVEL

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NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1910

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LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA

LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA

CHAPTER I

LOVE AT A SCHOOL

A PROCESSION of schoolboys having to meet a procession of schoolgirls on the Sunday's dead march, called a walk, round the park, could hardly go by without dropping to a hum in its chatter, and the shot of incurious half-eyes at the petticoated creatures—all so much of a swarm unless you stare at them like lanterns. The boys cast a glance because it relieved their heaviness; things were lumpish and gloomy that day of the week. The girls, who sped their peep of inquisition before the moment of transit, let it be seen that they had minds occupied with thoughts of their own.

Our gallant fellows forgot the intrusion of the foreign body as soon as it had passed. A sarcastic discharge was jerked by chance at the usher and the governess—at the old game, it seemed; or why did they keep steering the columns to meet? There was no fun in meeting; and it would never be happening every other Sunday, and oftener, by sheer toss-penny accident. They were moved like pieces for the pleasure of these two.

Sometimes the meeting occurred twice during the stupid march-out, when it became so nearly vexatious to boys almost biliously oppressed by the tedium of a day merely allowing them to shove the legs along, ironically naming it animal exercise, that some among

them pronounced the sham variation of monotony to be a bothering nuisance if it was going to happen every Sunday, though Sunday required diversions. They hated the absurdity in this meeting and meeting; for they were obliged to anticipate it, as a part of their ignominious weekly performance; and they could not avoid reflecting on it, as a thing done over again: it had them in front and in rear; and it was a kind of broadside mirror, flashing at them the exact opposite of themselves in an identically similar situation, that forced a resemblance.

Touching the old game, Cuper's fold was a healthy school, owing to the good lead of the head boy, Matey Weyburn, a lad with a heart for games to bring renown, and no thought about girls. His emulation, the fellows fancied, was for getting the school into a journal of the Sports. He used to read one sent him by a sporting officer of his name, and talk enviously of public schools, printed whatever they did—a privilege and dignity of which they had unrivalled enjoyment in the past days, when wealth was more jealously exclusive; and he was always prompting for challenges and saving up to pay expenses; and the fellows were to laugh at kicks and learn the art of self-defence—train to rejoice in whipcord muscles. The son of a tradesman, if a boy fell under the imputation, was worthy of honour with him, let the fellow but show grip and toughness. He loathed a skulker, and his face was known for any boy who would own to fatigue or confess himself beaten. 'Go to bed,' was one of his terrible stings. Matey was good at lessons, too—liked them; liked Latin and Greek; would help a poor stumbler.

Where he did such good work was in sharpening the fellows to excel. He kept them to the grindstone, so that they had no time for rusty brooding; and it was

not done by exhortations off a pedestal, like St. Paul at the Athenians, it breathed out of him every day of the week. He carried a light for followers. Whatever he demanded of them, he himself did it easily. He would say to boys, 'You 're going to be men,' meaning something better than women. There was a notion that Matey despised girls. Consequently, never much esteemed, they were in disfavour. The old game was mentioned only because of a tradition of an usher and governess leering sick eyes until they slunk away round a corner and married, and set up a school for themselves —an emasculate ending. Comment on it came of a design to show that the whole game had been examined and dismissed as uninteresting and profitless.

One of the boys alluded in Matey's presence to their general view upon the part played by womankind on the human stage, confident of a backing; and he had it, in a way: their noble chief whisked the subject, as not worth a discussion; but he turned to a younger chap, who said he detested girls, and asked him how about a sister at home; and the youngster coloured, and Matey took him and spun him round, with a friendly tap on the shoulder.

Odd remarks at intervals caused it to be suspected that he had ideas concerning girls. They were high as his head above the school; and there they were left, with Algebra and Homer, for they were not of a sort to inflame; until the boys noticed how he gave up speaking, and fell to hard looking, on the march past Miss Vincent's young ladies. A well-grown girl (calling herself young lady) made usually the left of the second couple from the front of the line of bonnets, and was by consent good-looking, though she was dark enough to get herself named Browny. In the absence of a fair girl of equal height to set beside her, Browny shone.

She had a nice mouth, ready for a smile at the corners; or so it was before Matey let her see that she was his mark. Now she kept her mouth asleep and her eyes half down, up to the moment of her nearing to pass when the girl opened on him, as if lifting her eyelids from sleep to the window, a full side-look, like a throb, and no disguise—no slyness or boldness either, not a bit of languishing. You might think her heart came quietly out.

The look was like the fall of light on the hills from the first of morning. It lasted half a minute, and left a ruffle for a good half-hour. Even the younger fellows, without knowing what affected them, were moved by the new picture of a girl, as if it had been a frontispiece of a romantic story some day to be read. She looked compelled to look, but consenting and unashamed; at home in submission; just the look that wins observant boys, shrewd as dogs to read by signs, if they are interested in the persons. They read Browny's meaning: that Matey had only to come and snatch her; he was her master, and she was a brave girl, ready to go all over the world with him; had taken to him as he to her, shot for shot. Her taking to the pick of the school was a capital proof that she was of the right sort. To be sure, she could not much help herself.

Some of the boys regretted her not being fair. But, as they felt, and sought to explain, in the manner of the wag of a tail, with elbows and eyebrows to one another's understanding, fair girls could never have let fly such a look; fair girls are softer, woollier, and when they mean to look serious, overdo it by craping solemn; or they pinafore a jigging eagerness, or hoist propriety on a chubby flaxen grin; or else they dart an eye, or they mince and prim and pout, and are sigh-away and dying-ducky, given to girls' tricks. Browny, after all, was the girl for Matey.

She won a victory right away and out of hand, on behalf of her cloud-and-moon sisters, as against the sunny-meadowy; for slanting intermediates are not espied of boys in anything: conquered by Browny, they went over to her colour, equal to arguing, that Venus at her mightiest must have been dark, or she would not have stood a comparison with the forest Goddess of the Crescent, swanning it through a lake—on the leap for the run of the chase—watching the dart, with her humming bow at breast. The fair are simple sugary things, prone to fat, like bread-sops in milk; but the others are milky nuts, good to bite, Lacedæmonian virgins, hard to beat, putting us on our mettle; and they are for heroes, and they can be brave. So these boys felt, conquered by Browny. A sneaking native taste for the forsaken side, known to renegades, hauled at them if her image waned during the week; and it waned a little, but Sunday restored and stamped it.

By a sudden turn the whole upper-school had fallen to thinking of girls, and the meeting on the Sunday was a prospect. One of the day-boarders had a sister in the seminary of Miss Vincent. He was plied to obtain information concerning Browny's name and her parents. He had it pat to hand in answer. No parents came to see her; an aunt came now and then. Her aunt's name was not wanted. Browny's name was Aminta Farrell.

Farrell might pass; Aminta was debated. This female Christian name had a foreign twang; it gave dissatisfaction. Boy after boy had a try at it, with the same effect: they could not speak the name without a pursing of the mouth and a puckering of the nose, beastly to see, as one little fellow reminded them on a day when Matey was in more than common favour, topping a pitch of rapture, for clean bowling, first ball, middle stump on the kick, the best bat of the other eleven in a match;

and, says this youngster, drawling, soon after the cheers and claps had subsided to business, 'Aminta.'

He made it funny by saying it as if to himself and the ground, in a subdued way, while he swung his leg on a half-circle, like a skater, hands in pockets. He was a sly young rascal, innocently precocious enough, and he meant no disrespect either to Browny or to Matey; but he had to run for it, his delivery of the name being so like what was in the breasts of the senior fellows, as to the inferiority of any Aminta to old Matey, that he set them laughing; and Browny was on the field, to reprove them, left of the tea-booth, with her school-mates, part of her head under a scarlet parasol.

A girl with such a name as Aminta might not be exactly up to the standard of old Matey, still, if he thought her so and she had spirit, the school was bound to subscribe; and that look of hers warranted her for taking her share in the story, like the brigand's wife loading guns for him while he knocks over the foremost carabineer on the mountain-ledge below, who drops on his back with a hellish expression.

Browny was then clearly seen all round, instead of only front-face, as on the Sunday in the park, when fellows could not spy backward after passing. The pleasure they had in seeing her all round involved no fresh stores of observation, for none could tell how she tied her back-hair, which was the question put to them by a cynic of a boy, said to be queasy with excess of sisters. They could tell that she was tall for a girl, or tallish—not a maypole. She drank a cup of tea, and ate a slice of bread-and-butter; no cake.

She appeared undisturbed when Matey, wearing his holiday white ducks, and all aglow, entered the booth. She was not expected to faint, only she stood for the foreign Aminta more than for their familiar Browny in

his presence. Not a sign of the look which had fired the school did she throw at him. Change the colour and you might compare her to a lobster fixed on end, with a chin and no eyes. Matey talked to Miss Vincent up to the instant of his running to bat. She would have liked to guess how he knew she had a brother on the medical staff of one of the regiments in India: she asked him twice, and his cheeks were redder than cricket in the sun. He said he read all the reports from India, and asked her whether she did not admire Lord Ormont, our general of cavalry, whose charge at the head of fifteen hundred horse in the last great battle shattered the enemy's right wing, and gave us the victory—rolled him up and stretched him out like a carpet for dusting. Miss Vincent exclaimed that it was really strange, now, he should speak of Lord Ormont, for she had been speaking of him herself in the morning to one of her young ladies, whose mind was bent on his heroical deeds. Matey turned his face to the group of young ladies, quite pleased that one of them loved his hero; and he met a smile here and there—not from Miss Aminta Farrell. She was a complete disappointment to the boys that day. 'Aminta' was mouthed at any allusion to her.

So, she not being a match for Matey, they let her drop. The flush that had swept across the school withered to a dry recollection, except when on one of their Sunday afternoons she fanned the desert. Lord Ormont became the subject of inquiry and conversation; and for his own sake—not altogether to gratify Matey. The Saturday autumn evening's walk home, after the race out to tea at a distant village, too late in the year for cricket, too early for regular football, suited Matey, going at long strides, for the story of his hero's adventures; and it was nicer than talk about girls, and puzzling. Here lay a clear field; for he had the right to speak of a

cavalry officer: his father died of wounds in the service, and Matey naturally intended to join the Dragoons; if he could get enough money to pay for mess, he said, laughing. Lord Ormont was his pattern of a warrior. We had in him a lord who cast off luxury to live like a Spartan when under arms, with a passion to serve his country and sustain the glory of our military annals. He revived respect for the noble class in the hearts of Englishmen. He was as good an authority on horse-flesh as any Englishman alive; the best for the management of cavalry: there never was a better cavalry leader. The boys had come to know that Browny admired Lord Ormont, so they saw a double reason why Matey should; and walking home at his grand swing in the October dusk, their school hero drew their national hero closer to them.

Every fellow present was dead against the usher, Mr. Shalders, when he took advantage of a pause to strike in with his 'Murat!'

He harped on Murat whenever he had a chance. Now he did it for the purpose of casting eclipse upon Major-General Lord Ormont, the son and grandson of English earls; for he was an earl by his title, and Murat was the son of an innkeeper. Shalders had to admit that Murat might have served in the stables when a boy. Honour to Murat, of course, for climbing the peaks! Shalders, too, might interest himself in military affairs and Murat; he did no harm, and he could be amusing. It rather added to his amount of dignity. It was rather absurd, at the same time, for an English usher to be spouting and glowing about a French General, who had been a stables-boy and became a king, with his Murat this, Murat that, and hurrah Murat in red and white and green uniform, tunic and breeches, and a chimney-afire of feathers; and how the giant he was charged at the head of ten thousand horse, all going like a cataract under a

rainbow over the rocks, right into the middle of the enemy and through; and he a spark ahead, and the enemy streaming on all sides flat away, as you see puffed smoke and flame of a bonfire. That was fun to set boys jigging. No wonder how in Russia the Cossacks feared him, and scampered from the shadow of his plumes —were clouds flying off his breath! That was a fine warm picture for the boys on late autumn or early winter evenings, Shalders warming his back at the grate, describing bivouacs in the snow. They liked well enough to hear him when he was not opposing Matey and Lord Ormont. He perked on his toes, and fetched his hand from behind him to flourish it when his Murat came out. The speaking of the name clapped him on horseback— the only horseback he ever knew. He was as fond of giving out the name Murat as you see in old engravings of tobacco-shops men enjoying the emission of their whiff of smoke.

Matey was not inclined to class Lord Ormont alongside Murat, a first-rate horseman and an eagle-eye, as Shalders rightly said; and Matey agreed that forty thousand cavalry under your orders is a toss above fifteen hundred; but the claim for a Frenchman of a superlative merit to swallow and make nothing of the mention of our best cavalry generals irritated him to call Murat a mountebank.

Shalders retorted, that Lord Ormont was a reprobate.

Matey hoped he would some day write us an essay on the morals of illustrious generals of cavalry; and Shalders told him he did not advance his case by talking nonsense.

Each then repeated to the boys a famous exploit of his hero. Their verdict was favourable to Lord Ormont. Our English General learnt riding before he was ten years old, on the Pampas, where you ride all day, and

cook your steak for your dinner between your seat and your saddle. He rode with his father and his uncle, Muncastle, the famous traveller, into Paraguay. He saw fighting before he was twelve. Before he was twenty he was learning outpost duty in the Austrian frontier cavalry. He served in the Peninsula, served in Canada, served in India, volunteered for any chance of distinction. No need to say much of his mastering the picked Indian swordsmen in single combat: he knew their trick, and was quick to save his reins when they made a dash threatening the headstroke—about the same as disabling sails in old naval engagements.

That was the part for the officer; we are speaking of the General. For that matter, he had as keen an eye for the field and the moment for his arm to strike as any Murat. One would have liked to see Murat matched against the sabre of a wily Rajpoot! As to campaigns and strategy, Lord Ormont's head was a map. What of Murat and Lord Ormont horse to horse and sword to sword? Come, imagine that, if you are for comparisons. And if Lord Ormont never headed a lot of thousands, it does not prove he was unable. Lord Ormont was as big as Murat. More, he was a Christian to his horses. How about Murat in that respect? Lord Ormont cared for his men: did Murat so particularly much? And he was as cunning fronting odds, and a thunderbolt at the charge. Why speak of him in the past? He is an English lord, a lord by birth, and he is alive; things may be expected of him to-morrow or next day.

Shalders here cut Matey short by meanly objecting to that.

'Men are mortal,' he said, with a lot of pretended stuff, deploring our human condition in the elegy strain; and he fell to reckoning the English hero's age—as that he, Lord Ormont, had been a name in the world for the last

twenty-five years or more. The noble lord could be no chicken. We are justified in calculating, by the course of nature, that his term of activity is approaching, or has approached, or, in fact, has drawn to its close.

'If your estimate, sir, approaches to correctness,' rejoined Matey—tellingly, his comrades thought.

'Sixty, as you may learn some day, is a serious age, Matthew Weyburn.'

Matey said he should be happy to reach it with half the honours Lord Ormont had won.

'Excepting the duels,' Shalders had the impudence to say.

'If the cause is a good one!' cried Matey.

'The cause, or Lord Ormont has been maligned, was reprehensible in the extremest degree.' Shalders cock-horsed on his heels to his toes and back with a bang.

'What was the cause, if you please, sir?' a boy, probably naughty, inquired; and as Shalders did not vouchsafe a reply, the bigger boys knew.

They revelled in the devilish halo of skirts on the whirl encircling Lord Ormont's laurelled head.

That was a spark in their blood struck from a dislike of the tone assumed by Mr. Shalders to sustain his argument; with his 'men are mortal,' and talk of a true living champion as 'no chicken,' and the wordy drawl over 'justification for calculating the approach of a close to a term of activity'—in the case of a proved hero!

Guardians of boys should make sure that the boys are on their side before they raise the standard of virtue. Nor ought they to summon morality for support of a polemic. Matey Weyburn's object of worship rode superior to a morality puffing its phrasy trumpet. And, somehow, the sacrifice of an enormous number of women to Lord Ormont's glory seemed natural; the very thing that should be, in the case of a first-rate military hero

and commander—Scipio notwithstanding. It brightens his flame, and it is agreeable to them. That is how they come to distinction: they have no other chance; they are only women; they are mad to be singed, and they rush pell-mell, all for the honour of the candle.

Shortly after this discussion Matey was heard informing some of the bigger fellows he could tell them positively that Lord Ormont's age was under fifty-four—the prime of manhood, and a jolly long way off death! The greater credit to him, therefore, if he had been a name in the world for anything like the period Shalders insinuated, 'to get himself out of a sad quandary.' Matey sounded the queer word so as to fix it sticking to the usher, calling him Mr. Peter Bell Shalders, at which the boys roared, and there was a question or two about names, which belonged to verses, for people caring to read poems.

To the joy of the school he displayed a greater knowledge of Murat than Shalders had: named the different places in Europe where Lord Ormont and Murat were both springing to the saddle at the same time—one a Marshal, the other a lieutenant; one a king, to be off his throne any day, the other a born English nobleman, seated firm as fate. And he accused Murat of carelessness of his horses, ingratitude to his benefactor, circussy style. Shalders went so far as to defend Murat for attending to the affairs of his kingdom, instead of galloping over hedges and ditches to swell Napoleon's ranks in distress. Matey listened to him there; he became grave; he nodded like a man saying, 'I suppose we must examine it in earnest.' The school was damped to hear him calling it a nice question. Still, he said he thought he should have gone; and that settled it.

The boys inclined to speak contemptuously of Shalders. Matey would not let them; he contrasted Shalders with

the other ushers, who had no enthusiasms. He said enthusiasms were salt to a man; and he liked Shalders for spelling at his battles and thinking he understood them, and admiring Murat, and reading Virgil and parts of Lucan for his recreation. He said he liked the French because they could be splendidly enthusiastic. He almost lost his English flavour when he spoke in downright approval of a small French fellow, coming from Orthez, near the Pyrenees, for senselessly dashing and kicking at a couple of English who jeered to hear Orthez named—a place trampled under Wellington's heels, on his march across conquered France. The foreign little cockerel was a clever lad, learning English fast, and anxious to show he had got hold of the English trick of not knowing when he was beaten. His French vanity insisted on his engaging the two, though one of them stood aside, and the other let him drive his nose all the compass round at a poker fist. What was worse, Matey examined these two, in the interests of fair play, as if he doubted.

Little Emile Grenat set matters right with his boast to vindicate his country against double the number, and Matey praised him, though he knew Emile had been floored without effort by the extension of a single fist. He could not hear the French abused; he said they were chivalrous, they were fine fellows, topping the world in some things; his father had fought them and learnt to respect them. Perhaps his father had learnt to respect Jews, for there was a boy named Abner, he protected, who smelt Jewish; he said they ran us Gentiles hard, and carried big guns.

Only a reputation like Matey's could have kept his leadership from a challenge. Joseph Masner, formerly a rival, went about hinting and shrugging; all to no purpose, you find boys born to be chiefs. On the day of the snow-fight Matey won the toss, and chose

J. Masner first pick; and Masner, aged seventeen and some months, big as a navvy, lumbered across to him and took his directions, proud to stand in the front centre, at the head of the attack, and bear the brunt—just what he was fit for. Matey gave no offence by choosing, half-way down the list, his little French friend, whom he stationed beside himself, rather off his battle-front, as at point at cricket, not quite so far removed. Two boys at his heels piled ammunition. The sides met midway of a marshy ground, where a couple of flat and shelving banks, formed for a broad new road, good for ten abreast—counting a step of the slopes—ran transverse; and the order of the game was to clear the bank and drive the enemy on to the frozen ditch-water. Miss Vincent heard in the morning from the sister of little Collett of the great engagement coming off; she was moved by curiosity, and so the young ladies of her establishment beheld the young gentlemen of Mr. Cuper's in furious division, and Matey's sure aim and hard fling, equal to a slinger's, relieving J. Masner of a foremost assailant with a spanker on the nob. They may have fancied him clever for selecting a position rather comfortable, as things went, until they had sight of him with his little French ally and two others, ammunition boys to rear, descending one bank and scaling another right into the flank of the enemy, when his old tower of a Masner was being heavily pressed by numbers. Then came a fight hand to hand, but the enemy stood in a clamp; not to split like a nut between crackers, they gave way and rolled, backing in lumps from bank to ditch.

The battle was over before the young ladies knew. They wondered to see Matey shuffling on his coat and hopping along at easy bounds to pay his respects to Miss Vincent, near whom was Browny; and this time he and

Browny talked together. He then introduced little Emile to her. She spoke of Napoleon at Brienne, and complimented Matey. He said he was cavalry, not artillery, that day. They talked to hear one another's voices. By constantly appealing to Miss Vincent he made their conversation together seem as under her conduct; and she took a slide on some French phrases with little Emile. Her young ladies looked shrinking and envious to see the fellows wet to the skin, laughing, wrestling, linking arms; and some, who were clown-faced with a wipe of scarlet, getting friends to rub their cheeks with snow, all of them happy as larks in air, a big tea steaming for them at the school. Those girls had a leap and a fall of the heart, glad to hug themselves in their dry clothes, and not so warm as the dripping boys were, nor so madly fond of their dress-circle seats to look on at a play they were not allowed even to desire to share. They looked on at blows given and taken in good temper, hardship sharpening jollity. The thought of the difference between themselves and the boys must have been something like the tight band—call it corset—over the chest, trying to lift and stretch for draughts of air. But Browny's feeling naturally was, that all this advantage for the boys came of Matey Weyburn's lead.

Miss Vincent with her young ladies walked off in couples, orderly chicks, the usual Sunday march of their every day. The school was coolish to them; one of the fellows hummed bars of some hymn tune, rather faster than church. And next day there was a murmur of letters passing between Matey and Browny regularly, little Collett for postman. Anybody might have guessed it, but the report spread a feeling that girls are not the entirely artificial beings or flat targets we suppose. The school began to brood, like air deadening on oven-heat. Winter is hen-mother to the idea of love in schools, if

the idea is fairly entered. Various girls of different colours were selected by boys for animated correspondence, that never existed and was vigorously prosecuted, with efforts to repress contempt of them in courtship for their affections. They found their part of it by no means difficult when they imagined the lines without the words, or, better still, the letter without the lines. A holy satisfaction belonged to the sealed thing; the breaking of the seal and inspection of the contents imposed perplexity on that sentiment. They thought of certain possible sentences Matey and Browny would exchange; but the plain, conceivable, almost visible, outside of the letter had a stronger spell for them than the visionary inside. This fancied contemplation of the love-letter was reversed in them at once by the startling news of Miss Vincent's discovery and seizure of the sealed thing, and her examination of the burden it contained. Then their thirst was for drama—to see, to drink every wonderful syllable those lovers had written.

Miss Vincent's hand was upon one of Matey's letters. She had come across the sister of little Collett, Selina her name was, carrying it. She saw nothing of the others. Aminta was not the girl to let her. Nor did Mr. Cuper dare demand from Matey a sight or restitution of the young lady's half of the correspondence. He preached heavily at Matey; deplored that the boy he most trusted, etc.—the school could have repeated it without hearing. We know the master's lecture in tones—it sings up to sing down, and touches nobody. As soon as he dropped to natural talk, and spoke of his responsibility and Miss Vincent's, Matey gave the word of a man of honour that he would not seek to communicate further with Miss Farrell at the school.

Now there was a regular thunder-hush among the boys on the rare occasions when they met the girls.

All that Matey and Browny were forbidden to write they *looked*—much like what it had been before the discovery; and they dragged the boys back from promised instant events. It was, nevertheless, a heaving picture, like the sea in the background of a marine piece at the theatre, which rouses anticipations of storm, and shows readiness. Browny's full eyebrow sat on her dark eye like a cloud of winter noons over the vanishing sun. Matey was the prisoner gazing at light of a barred window and measuring the strength of the bars. She looked unhappy, but looked unbeaten more. Her look at him fed the school on thoughts of what love really is, when it is not fished out of books and poetry. For though she was pale, starved and pale, they could see she was never the one to be sighing; and as for him, he looked ground down all to edge. However much they puzzled over things, she made them feel they were sure, as to her, that she drove straight and meant blood, the life or death of it: all her own, if need be, and confidence in the captain she had chosen. She could have been imagined saying, There is a storm, but I am ready to embark with you this minute.

That sign of courage in real danger ennobled her among girls. The name Browny was put aside for a respectful Aminta. Big and bright events to come out in the world were hinted, from the love of such a couple. The boys were not ashamed to speak the very word love. How he does love that girl! Well, and how she loves him! She did, but the boys had to be seeing her look at Matey if they were to put the girl on some balanced equality with a fellow she was compelled to love. It seemed to them that he gave, and that she was a creature carried to him, like driftwood along the current of the flood, given, in spite of herself. When they saw those eyes of hers they were impressed with an idea of

her as a voluntary giver too; pretty well the half to the bargain; and it confused their notion of feminine inferiority. They resolved to think her an exceptional girl, which, in truth, they could easily do, for none but an exceptional girl could win Matey to love her.

Since nothing appeared likely to happen at the school, they speculated upon what would occur out in the world, and were assisted to conjecture by a rumour, telling of Aminta Farrell's aunt as a resident at Dover. Those were days when the benevolently international M. de Porquet had begun to act as interpreter to English schools in the portico of the French language; and under his guidance it was asked, in contempt of the answer, *Combien de postes d'ici à Douvres?* But, accepting the rumour as a piece of information, the answer became important. *Ici* was twenty miles to the north-west of London. How long would it take Matey to reach Douvres? Or at which of the *combien* did he intend to waylay and away with Aminta? The boys went about pounding at the interrogative French phrase in due sincerity, behind the burlesque of traveller bothering coachman. Matey's designs could be guessed only by a knowledge of his character: that he was not the fellow to give up the girl he had taken to; and impediments might multiply, but he would bear them down. Three days before the break-up of the school another rumour came tearing through it: Aminta's aunt had withdrawn her from Miss Vincent's. And now rose the question, two-dozen-mouthed, Did Matey know her address at Douvres? His face grew stringy and his voice harder, and his eyes ready to burst from a smother of fire. All the same, he did his work: he was the good old fellow at games, considerate in school affairs, kind to the youngsters; he was heard to laugh. He liked best the company of his little French friend from Orthez, over

whose shoulder his hand was laid sometimes as they strolled and chatted in two languages. He really went a long way to make French fellows popular, and the boys were sorry that little Emile was off to finish his foreign education in Germany. His English was pretty good, thanks to Matey. He went away, promising to remember Old England, saying he was French first, and a Briton next. He had lots of pluck; which accounted for Matey's choice of him as a friend among the juniors.

CHAPTER II

LADY CHARLOTTE

Love-passages at a school must produce a ringing crisis if they are to leave the rosy impression which spans the gap of holidays. Neither Matey nor Browny returned to their yoke, and Cuper's boys recollected the couple chiefly on Sundays. They remembered several of Matey's doings and sayings: his running and high leaping, his bowling, a maxim or two of his, and the tight strong fellow he was; also that the damsel's colour distinctly counted for dark. She became nearly black in their minds. Well, and Englishmen have been known to marry Indian princesses: some have a liking for negresses. There are Nubians rather pretty in pictures, if you can stand thick lips. Her colour does not matter, provided the girl is of the right sort. The exchange of letters between the lovers was mentioned. The discovery by Miss Vincent of their cool habit of corresponding passed for an incident; and there it remained, stiff as a post, not being heated by a story to run. So the foregone excitement lost warmth, and went out like

a winter sun at noon or a match lighted before the candle is handy.

Lord Ormont continued to be a subject of discussion from time to time, for he was a name in the newspapers; and Mr. Shalders had been worked by Matey Weyburn into a state of raw antagonism at the mention of the gallant General; he could not avoid sitting in judgement on him.

According to Mr. Shalders, the opinion of all thoughtful people in England was with John Company and the better part of the Press to condemn Lord Ormont in his quarrel with the Commissioner of one of the Indian provinces, who had the support of the Governor of his Presidency and of the Viceroy; the latter not unreservedly, yet ostensibly inclined to condemn a too prompt military hand. The Gordian knot of a difficulty cut is agreeable in the contemplation of an official chief hesitating to use the sword and benefiting by having it done for him. Lord Ormont certainly cut the knot.

Mr. Shalders was cornered by the boys, coming at him one after another without a stop, vowing it was the exercise of a military judgement upon a military question at a period of urgency, which had brought about the quarrel with the Commissioner and the reproof of the Governor. He betrayed the man completely cornered by generalizing. He said—

'We are a civilian people; we pride ourselves on having civilian methods.'

'How can that be if we have won India with guns and swords?'

'But that splendid jewel for England's tiara won,' said he (and he might as well have said crown), 'we are bound to sheathe the sword and govern by the Book of the Law.'

'But if they won't have the Book of the Law!'

'They know the power behind it.'

'Not if we knock nothing harder than the Book of the Law upon their skulls.'

'Happily for the country, England's councils are not directed by boys!'

'Ah, but we 're speaking of India, Mr. Shalders.'

'You are presuming to speak of an act of insubordination committed by a military officer under civilian command.'

'What if we find an influential Indian prince engaged in conspiracy?'

'We look for proof.'

'Suppose we have good proof?'

'We summon him to exonerate himself.'

'No; we mount and ride straight away into his territory, spot the treason, deport him, and rule in his place!'

It was all very well for Mr. Shalders to say he talked to boys; he was cornered again, as his shrug confessed.

The boys asked among themselves whether he would have taken the same view if his Murat had done it!

These illogical boys fought for Matey Weyburn in their defence of Lord Ormont. Somewhere, they were sure, old Matey was hammering to the same end—they could hear him. Thought of him inspired them to unwonted argumentative energy, that they might support his cause, and scatter the gloomy prediction of the school, as going to the dogs now Matey had left.

The subject provoked everywhere in Great Britain a division similar to that between master and boys at Cuper's establishment: one party for our modern English magisterial methods with Indians, the other for the decisive Oriental at the early time, to suit their native tastes; and the Book of the Law is to be conciliatingly addressed to their sentiments by a benign civilizing

Power, or the sword is out smartly at the hint of a warning to protect the sword's conquests. Under one aspect we appear potteringly European; under another, drunk of the East.

Lord Ormont's ride at the head of two hundred horsemen across a stretch of country including hill and forest, to fall like a bolt from the blue on the suspected Prince in the midst of his gathering warriors, was a handsome piece of daring, and the high-handed treatment of the Prince was held by his advocates to be justified by the provocation and the result. He scattered an unprepared body of many hundreds, who might have enveloped him, and who would presumptively have stood their ground, had they not taken his handful to be the advance of regiments. These are the deeds that win empires! the argument in his favour ran. Are they of a character to maintain empires? the counter-question was urged. Men of a deliberative aspect were not wanting in approval of the sharp and summary of the sword in the air when we have to deal with Indians. They chose to regard it as a matter of the dealing with Indians, and put aside the question of the contempt of civil authority.

Counting the cries, Lord Ormont won his case. Festival aldermen, smoking clubmen, buckskin squires, obsequious yet privately excitable tradesmen, sedentary coachmen and cabmen, of Viking descent, were set to think like boys about him: and the boys, the women, and the poets formed a tipsy chorus. Journalists, on the whole, were fairly halved, as regarded numbers. In relation to weight, they were with the burgess and the presbyter; they preponderated heavily in the direction of England's burgess view of all cases disputed between civilian and soldier. But that was when the peril was over.

Admirers of Lord Ormont enjoyed a perusal of a letter

addressed by him to the burgess's journal; and so did his detractors. The printing of it was an act of editorial ruthlessness. The noble soldier had no mould in his intellectual or educational foundry for the casting of sentences; and the editor's leading type to the letter, without further notice of the writer—who was given a prominent place or scaffolding for the execution of himself publicly, if it pleased him to do that thing—tickled the critical mind. Lord Ormont wrote intemperately.

His Titanic hurling of blocks against critics did no harm to an enemy skilled in the use of trimmer weapons, notably the fine one of letting big missiles rebound. He wrote from India, with Indian heat—'curry and capsicums,' it was remarked. He dared to claim the countenance of the Commander-in-chief of the Army of India for an act disapproved by the India House. Other letters might be on their way, curryer than the preceding, his friends feared; and might also be malevolently printed, similarly commissioning the reverberation of them to belabour his name before the public. Admirers were still prepared to admire; but aldermen not at the feast, squirearchs not in the saddle or at the bottle, some few of the juvenile and female fervent, were becoming susceptible to a frosty critical tone in the public pronunciation of Lord Ormont's name since the printing of his letter and the letters it called forth. None of them doubted that his case was good. The doubt concerned the effect on it of his manner of pleading it. And if he damaged his case, he compromised his admirers. Why, the case of a man who has cleverly won a bold stroke for his country must be good, as long as he holds his tongue. A grateful country will right him in the end: he has only to wait, and not so very long. 'This I did: now examine it.' Nothing more needed to be said by him, if that.

True, he has a temper. It is owned that he is a hero. We take him with his qualities, impetuosity being one, and not unsuited to his arm of the service, as he has shown. If his temper is high, it is an element of a character proved heroical. So has the sun his blotches, and we believe that they go to nourish the luminary, rather than that they are a disease of the photosphere.

Lord Ormont's apologists had to contend with anecdotes and dicta now pouring in from offended Britons, for illustration of an impetuosity fit to make another Charles XII. of Sweden—a gratuitous Coriolanus haughtiness as well, new among a people accustomed socially to bow the head to their nobles, and not, of late, expecting a kick for their pains. Newspapers wrote of him that, 'a martinet to subordinates, he was known for the most unruly of lieutenants.' They alluded to current sayings, as that he 'habitually took counsel of his horse on the field when a movement was entrusted to his discretion.' Numerous were the journalistic sentences running under an air of eulogy of the lordly warrior purposely to be tripped, and producing their damnable effect, despite the obvious artifice. The writer of the letter from Bombay, signed Ormont, was a born subject for the antithetical craftsmen's tricky springes.

He was, additionally, of infamous repute for morals in burgess estimation, from his having a keen appreciation of female beauty and a prickly sense of masculine honour. The stir to his name roused pestilential domestic stories. In those days the aristocrat still claimed licence, and eminent soldier-nobles, comporting themselves as imitative servants of their god Mars, on the fields of love and war, stood necessarily prepared to vindicate their conduct on the field of the measured paces, without deeming themselves bounden to defend the course they took. Our burgess, who bowed head to his aristocrat, and hired

the soldier to fight for him, could not see that such misbehaviour necessarily ensued. Lord Ormont had fought duels at home and abroad. His readiness to fight again, and against odds, and with a totally unused weapon, was exhibited by his attack on the Press in the columns of the Press. It wore the comical face to the friends deploring it, which belongs to things we do that are so very like us. They agreed with his devoted sister, Lady Charlotte Eglett, as to the prudence of keeping him out of England for a time, if possible.

At the first perusal of the letter, Lady Charlotte quitted her place in Leicestershire, husband, horses, guests, the hunt, to scour across a vacant London and pick up acquaintances under stress to be spots there in the hunting season, with them to gossip for counsel on the subject of 'Ormont's hand-grenade,' and how to stop and extinguish a second. She was a person given to plain speech. 'Stinkpot' she called it, when acknowledging foul elements in the composition and the harm it did to the unskilful balist. Her view of the burgess English imaged a mighty monster behind bars, to whom we offer anything but our hand. As soon as he gets hold of that he has you; he won't let it loose with flesh on the bones. We must offend him—we can't be man or woman without offending his tastes and his worships; but while we keep from contact (*i.e.* intercommunication) he may growl, he is harmless. Witness the many occasions when her brother offended worse, and had been unworried, only growled at, and distantly, not in a way to rouse concern; and at the next review, or procession into the City, or public display of any sort, Ormont had but to show himself, he was the popular favourite immediately. He had not committed the folly of writing a letter to a newspaper then.

Lady Charlotte paid an early visit to the office of the

great London solicitor, Arthur Abner, who wielded the Law as an instrument of protection for countless illustrious people afflicted by what they stir or attract in a wealthy metropolis. She went simply to gossip of her brother's affairs with a refreshing man of the world, not given to circumlocutions, and not afraid of her: she had no deeper object; but fancying she heard the clerk, on his jump from the stool, inform her that Mr. Abner was out, 'Out?' she cried, and rattled the room, thumping, under knitted brows. 'Out of town?' For a man of business taking holidays, when a lady craves for gossip, disappointed her faith in him as cruelly as the shut-up empty inn the broken hunter knocking at a hollow door miles off home.

Mr. Abner, hatted and gloved and smiling, came forth. '"Going out," the man meant, Lady Charlotte. At your service for five minutes.'

She complimented his acuteness, in the remark, 'You see I 've only come to chat,' and entered his room.

He led her to her theme: 'The excitement is pretty well over.'

'My brother 's my chief care—always was. I 'm afraid he 'll be pitchforking at it again, and we shall have another blast. That letter ought never to have been printed. That editor deserves the horsewhip for letting it appear. If he prints a second one I shall treat him as a personal enemy.'

'Better make a friend of him.'

'How?'

'Meet him at my table.'

She jumped an illumined half-about on her chair. 'So I will, then. What are the creature's tastes?'

'Hunting will do.'

'Hunts, does he?' The editor rose in her mind from the state of neuter to something of a man. 'I recollect

an article in that paper on the Ormont duel. I hate duelling, but I side with my brother. I had to laugh, though. Luckily, there 's no woman on hand at present, as far as I know. Ormont's not likely to be hooked by garrison women or blacks. Those coloured women—some of ours too—send the nose to the clouds; not a bad sign for health. And there are men like that old Cardinal Guicciardini tells of . . . hum! Ormont's not one of them. I hope he 'll stay in India till this blows over, or I shall be hearing of provocations.'

'You have seen the Duke?'

She nodded. Her reserve was a summary of the interview. 'Kind, as he always is,' she said. 'Ormont has no chance of employment unless there 's a European war. They can't overlook him in case of war. He 'll have to pray for that.'

'Let us hope we shan't get it.'

'My wish; but I have to think of my brother. If he 's in England with no employment, he 's in a mess with women and men both. He kicks if he 's laid aside to rust. He has a big heart. That 's what I said: all he wants is to serve his country. If you won't have war, give him Gibraltar or Malta, or command of one of our military districts. The South-eastern 'll be vacant soon. He 'd like to be Constable of the Castle, and have an eye on France.'

'I think he 's fond of the French?'

'Loves the French. Expects to have to fight them all the same. He loves his country best. Here 's the man everybody 's abusing!'

'I demur, my lady. I was dining the other day with a client of mine, and a youngster was present who spoke of Lord Ormont in a way I should like you to have heard. He seemed to know the whole of Lord Ormont's career, from the time of the ride to Paraguay up to

the capture of the plotting Rajah. He carried the table.'

'Good boy! We must turn to the boys for justice, then. Name your day for this man, this editor.'

'I will see him. You shall have the day to-night.'

Lady Charlotte and the editor met. She was racy, he anecdotal. Stag, fox, and hare ran before them, over fields and through drawing-rooms: the scent was rich. They found that they could talk to one another as they thought; that he was not the Isle-bound burgess, nor she the postured English great lady; and they exchanged salt, without which your current scandal is of exhausted savour. They enjoyed the peculiar novel relish of it, coming from a social pressman and a dame of high society. The different hemispheres became known as one sphere to these birds of broad wing convening in the upper blue above a quartered carcase earth.

A week later a letter, the envelope of a bulky letter in Lord Ormont's handwriting, reached Lady Charlotte. There was a line from the editor:

'Would it please your ladyship to have this printed?'

She read the letter, and replied:

'Come to me for six days; you shall have the best mount in the county.'

An editor devoid of malice might probably have forborne to print a letter that appealed to Lady Charlotte, or touched her sensations, as if a glimpse of the moon, on the homeward ride in winter on a nodding horse, had suddenly bared to view a precipitous quarry within two steps. There is no knowing: few men can forbear to tell a spicy story of their friends; and an editor, to whom an exhibition of the immensely preposterous on the part

of one writing arrogantly must be provocative, would feel the interests of his Journal, not to speak of the claims of readers, pluck at him when he meditated the consignment of such a precious composition to extinction. Lady Charlotte withheld a sight of the letter from Mr. Eglett. She laid it in her desk, understanding well that it was a laugh lost to the world. Poets could reasonably feign it to shake the desk inclosing it. She had a strong sense of humour; her mind reverted to the desk in a way to make her lips shut grimly. She sided with her brother.

Only pen in hand did he lay himself open to the enemy. In his personal intercourse he was the last of men to be taken at a disadvantage. Lady Charlotte was brought round to the distasteful idea of some help coming from a legitimate adjunct at his elbow: a restraining woman—wife, it had to be said. And to name the word wife for Thomas Rowsley, Earl of Ormont, put up the porcupine quills she bristled with at the survey of a sex thirsting, and likely to continue thirsting for such honour. What woman had she known fit to bear the name? She had assumed the judicial seat upon the pretensions of several, and dismissed them to their limbo, after testifying against them. Who is to know the fit one in these mines of deception? Women of the class offering wives decline to be taken on trial; they are boxes of puzzles —often dire surprises. Her brother knew them well enough to shy at the box. Her brother Rowsley had a funny pride, like a boy at a game, at the never having been caught by one among the many he made captive. She let him have it all to himself.

He boasted it to a sister sharing the pride—exultant in the cry of the hawk, scornful of ambitious poultry, a passed finger-post to the plucked, and really regretful that no woman had been created fit for him. When

she was not siding with her brother, women, however contemptible for their weakness, appeared to her as better than barn-door fowl, or vermin in their multitudes gnawing to get at the cheese-trap. She could be humane, even sisterly, with women whose conduct or prattle did not outrage plain sense, just as the stickler for the privileges of her class was large-heartedly charitable to the classes flowing in oily orderliness round about below it—if they did so flow. Unable to read woman's character, except upon the broadest lines, as it were the spider's main threads of its web, she read men minutely, from the fact that they were neither mysteries nor terrors to her, but creatures of importunate appetites, humorous objects; very manageable, if we leave the road to their muscles, dress their wounds, smoothe their creases, plume their vanity; and she had an unerring eye for the man to be used when a blow was needed, methods for setting him in action likewise. She knew how much stronger than ordinary men the woman who can put them in motion. They can be set to serve as pieces of cannon, under compliments on their superior powers, which were not all undervalued by her on their own merits, for she worshipped strength. But she said, with a certain amount of truth, that the women unaware of the advantage Society gave them (as to mastering men) were fools.

Tender, is not a word coming near to Lady Charlotte. Thoughtful on behalf of the poor foolish victims of men she was. She had saved some, avenged others. It should be stated, that her notion of saving was the saving of them from the public: she had thrown up a screen. The saving of them from themselves was another matter—hopeless, to her thinking. How preach at a creature on the bend of passion's rapids! One might as well read a chapter from the Bible to delirious patients. When

once a woman is taken with the love-passion, we must treat her as bitten; hide her antics from the public: that is the principal business. If she recovers, she resumes her place, and horrid old Nature, who drove her to the frenzy, is unlikely to bother or, at least, overthrow her again, unless she is one of the detestable wantons, past compassion or consideration. In the case reviewed, the woman has gone through fire, and is none the worse for her experiences: worth ten times what she was, to an honest man, if men could be got to see it. Some do. Of those men who do not, Lady Charlotte spoke with the old family-nurse humour, which is familiar with the tricks and frailties of the infants; and it is a knife to probe the male, while seemingly it does the part of the napkin—pities and pats. They expect a return of much for the little that is next to nothing. They are dull of expectations: and of what else? They are hard bargainers.

She thought this of men; and she liked men by choice. She had old nurse's preference for the lustier male child. The others are puling things, easier to rear, because they bend better; and less esteemed, though they give less trouble, rouse less care. But when it came to the duel between the man and the woman, her sense of justice was moved to join her with the party of her unfairly handled sisters—a strong party, if it were not so cowardly, she had to think.

Mr. Eglett, her husband, accepted her—accepted the position into which he naturally fell beside her, and the ideas she imposed on him; for she never went counter to his principles. These were the fixed principles of a very wealthy man, who abhorred debt, and was punctilious in veracity, scrupulous in cleanliness of mind and body, devoted to the honour of his country, the interests of his class. She respected the high landmark possessing such

principles, and she was therefore enabled to lead without the wish to rule. As it had been between them at the beginning, so it was now, when they were grandparents running on three lines of progeny from two daughters and a son: they were excellent friends. Few couples can say more. The union was good English grey—that of a prolonged November, to which we are reconciled by occasions for the hunt and the gun. She was, nevertheless, an impassioned woman. The feeling for her brother helped to satisfy her heart's fires, though as little with her brother as with her husband was she demonstrative. Lord Ormont disrelished the caresses of relatives.

She, for her part, had so strong a sympathy on behalf of poor gentlemen reduced to submit to any but a young woman's hug, that when, bronzed from India, he quitted the carriage and mounted her steps at Olmer, the desire to fling herself on his neck and breast took form in the words: 'Here you are home again, Rowsley; glad to have you.' They shook hands firmly.

He remained three days at Olmer. His temper was mild, his frame of mind bad as could be. Angry evaporations had left a residuum of solid scorn for these 'English,' who rewarded soldierly services as though it were a question of damaged packages of calico. He threatened to take the first offer of a foreign State 'not in insurrection.' But clear sky was overhead. He was the Rowsley of the old boyish delight in field sports, reminiscences of prowlings and trappings in the woods, gropings along water-banks, enjoyment of racy gossip. He spoke wrathfully of 'one of their newspapers' which steadily persisted in withholding from publication every letter he wrote to it, after printing the first. And if it printed one, why not the others?

Lady Charlotte put it on the quaintness of editors.

He had found in London, perhaps, reason for saying that he should do well to be 'out of this country' as early as he could; adding, presently, that he meant to go, though 'it broke his heart to keep away from a six months' rest at Steignton,' his Wiltshire estate.

No woman was in the field. Lady Charlotte could have submitted to the intrusion of one of those at times wholesome victims, for the sake of the mollification the unhappy proud thing might bring to a hero smarting under injustice at the hands of chiefs and authorities.

He passed on to Steignton, returned to London, and left England for Spain, as he wrote word, saying he hoped to settle at Steignton next year. He was absent the next year, and longer. Lady Charlotte had the surprising news that Steignton was let, shooting and all, for five years; and he had no appointment out of England or at home. When he came to Olmer again he was under one of his fits of reserve, best undisturbed. Her sympathy with a great soldier snubbed, and active man rusting, kept her from remonstrance.

Three years later she was made meditative by the discovery of a woman's being absolutely in the field, mistress of the field, and having been there for a considerable period, dating from about the time when he turned his back on England to visit a comrade-in-arms condemned by the doctors to pass the winter in Malaga; and it was a young woman, a girl in her teens, a handsome girl. Handsome was to be expected; Ormont bargained for beauty. But report said the girl was very handsome, and showed breeding: she seemed a foreigner, walked like a Goddess, sat her horse the perfect Amazon. Rumour called her a Spaniard.

'Not if she rides!' Lady Charlotte cut that short.

Rumour had subsequently more to say. The reporter in her ear did not confirm it, and she was resolutely deaf

to a story incredible of her brother—the man, of all men living, proudest of his name, blood, station. So proud was he by nature, too, that he disdained to complain of rank injustice; he maintained a cheerful front against adversity and obloquy. And this man of complete self-command, who has every form of noble pride, gets cajoled like a twenty-year-old yahoo at college! Do you imagine it? To suppose of a man cherishing the name of Ormont, that he would bestow it legally on a woman, a stranger, and imperil his race by mixing blood with a creature of unknown lineage, was—why, of course, it was to suppose him struck mad, and there never had been madness among the Ormonts: they were too careful of the purity of the strain. Lady Charlotte talked. She was excited, and ran her sentences to blanks, a cunning way for ministering consolation to her hearing, where the sentence intended a question, and the blank ending caught up the query tone and carried it dwindling away to the most distant of throttled interrogatives. She had, in this manner, only to ask,—her hearing received the comforting answer it desired; for she could take that thin far sound as a travelling laughter of incredulity, triumphant derision.

This meant to her—though she scarcely knew it, though the most wilful of women declined to know it—a state of alarm. She had said of her brother in past days that he would have his time of danger after striking sixty. The dangerous person was to be young.

But, then, Ormont had high principles with regard to the dues to his family. His principles could always be trusted. The dangerous young person would have to be a person of lineage, of a certain station at least: no need for a titled woman, only for warranted good blood. Is that to be found certificated out of the rolls of Society? It may just possibly be found, without certificate, how-

ever, in those muddled caverns where the excluded intermingle. Here and there, in a peasant family, or a small country tradesman's just raised above a peasant, honest regenerating blood will be found. Nobles wanting refreshment from the soil might do worse than try a slip of one of those juicy weeds; ill-fated, sickly Royalties would be set-up striding through another half-century with such invigoration, if it could be done for them! There are tales. The tales are honourably discredited by the crazy constitutions of the heirs to the diadem.

Yes, but we are speculating on the matter seriously, as though it were one of intimate concern to the family. What is there to make us think that Ormont would marry? Impossible to imagine him intimidated. Unlikely that he, a practised reader of women, having so little of the woman in him, would be melted by a wily girl; as women in the twilight situation have often played the trick to come into the bright beams. How? They do a desperate thing, and call it generosity, and then they appeal from it to my lord's generosity; and so the two generosities drive off in a close carriage with a friend and a professional landlady for the blessing of the parson, and are legitimately united. Women have won round fools to give way in that way. And quite right too! thought Lady Charlotte, siding with nature and justice, as she reflected that no woman created would win round her brother to give way in that way. He was too acute. The moment the woman showed sign of becoming an actress, her doom was written. 'Poor idiot!' was not uncharitably inscribed by the sisterly lady on the tombstone of hopes aimed with scarce pardonable ambition at her brother.

She blew away the rumour. Ormont, she vowed, had not entitled any woman to share and bear his title. And this was her interpretation of the report: he permitted

(if he did permit) the woman to take his name, that he might have a scornful fling at the world maltreating him. Besides, the name was not published, it was not to be seen in the papers; it passed merely among male friends, tradesmen, servants: no great harm in that.

Listen further. Here is an unknown girl: why should he marry her? A girl consenting to the place beside a man of his handsome ripe age, is either bought, or she is madly enamoured; she does not dictate terms. Ormont is not of the brute buyers in that market. One sees it is the girl who leads the dance. A girl is rarely so madly enamoured as when she falls in love with her grandfather; she pitches herself at his head. This had not happened for the first time in Ormont's case; and he had never proposed marriage. Why should he do it now?

But again, if the girl has breeding to some extent, he might think it her due that she should pass under the safeguard of his name, out of sight.

Then, so far the report is trustworthy. We blow the rumour out of belief. A young woman there is: she is not a wife. Lady Charlotte allowed her the fairly respectable post of Hecate of the Shades, as long as the girl was no pretender to the place and name in the upper sphere. Her deductions were plausible, convincing to friends shaken by her vehement manner of coming at them. She convinced herself by means of her multitude of reasons for not pursuing inquiry. Her brother said nothing. There was no need for him to speak. He seemed on one or two occasions in the act of getting himself together for the communication of a secret; and she made ready to listen hard, with ears, eyebrows, shut mouth, and a gleam at the back of her eyes, for a signification of something she would refer him to after he had spoken. He looked at her and held his peace, or virtually

held it,—that is, he said not one word on the subject she was to have told him she had anticipated. Lady Charlotte ascribed it to his recollection of the quick blusher, the pained blusher, she was in her girlhood at mention or print of the story of men and women. Who, not having known her, could conceive it! But who could conceive that, behind the positive, plain-dealing, downright woman of the world, there was at times, when a nerve was touched or an old blocked path of imagination thrown open, a sensitive youthfulness, still quick to blush as far as the skin of a grandmother matron might show it!

CHAPTER III

THE TUTOR

There was no counting now on Lord Ormont's presence in the British gathering seasons, when wheatears wing across our fields or swallows return to their eaves. He forsook the hunt to roam the Continent, one of the vulgar band of tourists, honouring town only when May-flies had flown, and London's indiscriminate people went about without their volatile heads.

Lady Charlotte put these changed conditions upon the behaviour of the military authorities to her brother; saying that the wonder was he did not shake the dust of his country from his feet. In her wise head she rejoiced to think he was not the donkey she sketched for admiration; and she was partly consoled, or played at the taking of a comfort needed in her perpetual struggle with a phantom of a fact, by the reflection that a young woman on his arm would cause him to feel himself more at home abroad. Her mind's habit of living warmly

beside him in separation was vexed by the fixed intrusion of a female third person, who checked the run of intimate chatter, especially damped the fancied talk over early days—of which the creature was ignorant; and her propinquity to him arrested or broke the dialogue Lady Charlotte invented and pressed to renew. But a wife, while letting him be seen, would have insisted on appropriating the thought of him—all his days, past as well as present. An impassioned sister's jealousy preferred that it should not be a wife reigning to dispute her share of her brother in imagination.

Then came a rumour, telling of him as engaged upon the composition of his Memoirs.

Lady Charlotte's impulsive outcry: 'Writing them?' signified her grounds for alarm.

Happily, Memoirs are not among the silly deeds done in a moment; they were somewhere ahead and over the hills: a band of brigands rather than a homely shining mansion, it was true; but distant; and a principal question shrieked to know whether he was composing them for publication. She could look forward with a girl's pleasure to the perusal of them in manuscript, in a woody nook, in a fervour of partizanship, easily avoiding sight of errors, grammatical or moral. She chafed at the possible printing and publishing of them. That would be equivalent to an exhibition of him clean-stripped for a run across London—brilliant in himself, spotty in the offence. Published Memoirs indicate the end of a man's activity, and that he acknowledges the end; and at a period of Lord Ormont's life when the denial of it should thunder. They are his final chapter, making mummy of the grand figure they wrap in the printed stuff. They are virtually his apology. Can those knowing Lord Ormont hear him apologize? But it is a craven apology if we stoop to expound: we are seen as pleading

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our case before the public. Call it by any name you please, and under any attitude, it is that. And set aside the writing: it may be perfect; the act is the degradation. It is a rousing of swarms. His friends and the public will see the proudest nobleman of his day, pleading his case in mangled English, in the headlong of an outpoured, undrilled, rabble vocabulary, doubling the ridicule by his imperturbability over the ridicule he excites: he who is no more ridiculous, cried the partizan sister, conjuring up the scene, not an ace more ridiculous, than a judge of assize calling himself miserable sinner on Sunday before the parson, after he has very properly condemned half a score of weekday miserable sinners to penal servitude or the rope. Nobody laughs at the judge. Everybody will be laughing at the scornful man down half-way to his knee-caps with a stutter of an apology for having done his duty to his country, after stigmatizing numbers for inability or ill-will to do it. But Ormont's weapon is the sword, not a pen! Lady Charlotte hunted her simile till the dogs had it or it ran to earth.

She struck at the conclusion, that the young woman had been persuading him. An adoring young woman is the person to imagine and induce to the commission of such folly. 'What do you think? You have seen her, you say?' she asked of a man she welcomed for his flavour of the worldling's fine bile.

Lord Adderwood made answer: 'She may be having a hand in it. She worships, and that is your way of pulling gods to the ground.'

'Does she understand good English?'

'Speaks it.'

'Can she write?'

'I have never had a letter from her.'

'You tell me Morsfield admires the woman—would marry her to-morrow, if he could get her.'

'He would go through the ceremony Ormont has performed, I do not doubt.'

'I don't doubt all of you are ready. She doesn't encourage one?'

'On the contrary, all.'

'She 's clever. This has been going on for now seven years, and, as far as I know, she has my brother fast.'

'She may have done the clever trick of having him fast from the beginning.'

'She 'd like people to think it.'

'She has an aunt to advertize it.'

'Ormont can't swallow the woman, I 'm told.'

'Trying, if one is bound to get her down!'

'Boasts of the connection everywhere she 's admitted, Randeller says.'

'Randeller procures the admission to various parti-coloured places.'

'She must be a blinking moll-owl! And I ask any sane Christian or Pagan—proof enough!—would my brother Rowsley let his wife visit those places, those people? Monstrous to have the suspicion that he would, if you know him! Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, for example. I say nothing to hurt the poor woman; I back her against her imbecile of a husband. He brings a charge he can't support; she punishes him by taking three years' lease of independence, and kicks up the grass all over the paddock, and then comes cuckoo, barking his name abroad to have her home again. You can win the shyest filly to corn at last. She goes, and he digests ruefully the hotch-potch of a dish the woman brings him. Only the world spies a side-head at her, husbanded or not, though the main fault was his, and she had a right to insist that he should be sure of his charge before he smacked her in the face with it before the world. In dealing with a woman, a man commonly prudent—put

aside chivalry, justice, and the rest—should bind himself to disbelieve what he can't prove. Otherwise, let him expect his whipping, with or without ornament. My opinion is, Lawrence Finchley had no solid foundation for his charge, except his being an imbecile. She wasn't one of the adventurous women to jump the bars,—the gate had to be pushed open, and he did it. There she is; and I ask you, would my brother Rowsley let his *wife* be intimate with her? And there are others. And, *sauf votre respect*, the men—Morsfield for one, Randeller another!'

'They have a wholesome dread of the lion.'

'If they smell a chance with the lion's bone—it 's the sweeter for being the lion's. These metaphors carry us off our ground. I must let these Ormont Memoirs run and upset him, if they get to print. I 've only to oppose, printed they 'll be. The same if I say a word of this woman, he marries her to-morrow morning. You speak of my driving men. Why can't I drive Ormont? Because I 'm too fond of him. There you have the secret of the subjection of women: they can hold their own, and a bit more, when they have no enemy beating inside.'

'Hearts!—ah, well, it 's possible. I don't say no; I 've not discovered them,' Lord Adderwood observed.

They are rarely discovered in the haunts he frequented.

Her allusion to Mrs. Lawrence Finchley rapped him smartly, and she admired his impassiveness under the stroke. Such a spectacle was one of her pleasures.

Lady Charlotte mentioned incidentally her want of a tutor for her grandson Leo during the winter holidays. He suggested an application to the clergyman of her parish. She was at feud with the Rev. Stephen Hampton-Evey, and would not take, she said, a man to be a bootblack in her backyard or a woman a scullery-wench in her kitchen upon his recommendation. She

described the person of Mr. Hampton-Evey, his manner of speech, general opinions, professional doctrines; rolled him into a ball and bowled him, with a shrug for lamentation, over the decay of the good old order of manly English Protestant clergymen, who drank their port, bothered nobody about belief, abstained from preaching their sermon, if requested; were capital fellows in the hunting-field, too; for if they came, they had the spur to hunt in the devil's despite. Now we are going to have a kind of bitter, clawed, forked female, in vestments over breeches. 'How do you like that bundling of the sexes?'

Lord Adderwood liked the lines of division to be strictly and invitingly definite. He was thinking, as he reviewed the frittered appearance of the Rev. Stephen Hampton-Evey in Lady Charlotte's hands, of the possibility that Lord Ormont, who was reputed to fear nobody, feared her. In which case, the handsome young woman passing among his associates as the pseudo Lady Ormont might be the real one after all, and Isabella Lawrence Finchley prove right in the warning she gave to dogs of chase.

The tutor required by Lady Charlotte was found for her by Mr. Abner. Their correspondence on the subject filled the space of a week, and then the gentleman hired to drive a creaky wheel came down from London to Olmer, arriving late in the evening.

Lady Charlotte's blunt 'Oh!' when he entered her room and bowed upon the announcement of his name, was caused by an instantaneous perception and reflection that it would be prudent to keep her grand-daughter Philippa, aged between seventeen and eighteen, out of his way.

'You are a friend of Mr. Abner's, are you?'

He was not disconcerted. He replied, in an assured

and pleasant voice, 'I have hardly the pretension to be called a friend, madam.'

'Are you a Jew?'

Her abruptness knocked something like a laugh almost out of him, but he restrained the signs of it.

'I am not.'

'You wouldn't be ashamed to tell me you were one if you were?'

'Not at all.'

'You like the Jews?'

'Those I know I like.'

'Not many Christians have the good sense and the good heart of Arthur Abner. Now go and eat. Come back to me when you 've done. I hope you are hungry. Ask the butler for the wine you prefer.'

She had not anticipated the enrolment in her household of a man so young and good-looking. These were qualifications for Cupid's business, which his unstrained self-possession accentuated to a note of danger to her chicks, because she liked the taste of him. Her granddaughter Philippa was in the girl's waxen age; another, Beatrice, was coming to it. Both were under her care; and she was a vigilant woman, with an intuition and a knowledge of sex. She did not blame Arthur Abner for sending her a good-looking young man; she had only a general idea that tutors in a house, and even visiting tutors, should smell of dust and wear a snuffy appearance. The conditions will not always insure the tutors from foolishness, as her girl's experience reminded her, but they protect the girl.

'Your name is Weyburn; your father was an officer in the army, killed on the battle-field, Arthur Abner tells me,' was her somewhat severely-toned greeting to the young tutor on his presenting himself the second time.

It had the sound of the preliminary of an indictment read in a Court of Law.

'My father died of his wounds in hospital,' he said.

'Why did you not enter the service?'

'Want of an income, my lady.'

'Bad look-out. Army or Navy for gentlemen, if they stick to the school of honour. The sedentary professions corrupt men: bad for the blood. Those monastery monks found that out. They had to birch the devil out of them three times a day and half the night, howling like full-moon dogs all through their lives, till the flesh was off them. That was their exercise, if they were for holiness. My brother, Lord Ormont, has never been still in his youth or his manhood. See him now. He counts his years by scores; and he has about as many wrinkles as you when you 're smiling. His cheeks are as red as yours now you 're blushing. You ought to have left off that trick by this time. It 's well enough in a boy.'

Against her will she was drawn to the young man, and her consciousness of it plucked her back to caution with occasional jerks—quaint alternations of the familiar and the harshly formal, in the stranger's experience.

'If I have your permission, Lady Charlotte,' said he, 'the reason why I mount red a little—if I do it—is, you mention Lord Ormont, and I have followed his career since I was the youngest of boys.'

'Good to begin with the worship of a hero. He can't sham, can't deceive—not even a woman; and you 're old enough to understand the temptation: they 're so silly. All the more, it 's a point of honour with a man of honour to shield her from herself. When it 's a girl——'

The young man's eyebrows bent.

'Chapters of stories, if you want to hear them,' she

resumed; 'and I can vouch some of them true. Lord Ormont was never one of the wolves in a hood. Whatever you hear of him, you may be sure he laid no trap. He 's just the opposite to the hypocrite; so hypocrites hate him. I 've heard them called high-priests of decency. Then we choose to be indecent and honest, if there 's a God to worship. Fear, they 're in the habit of saying—we are to fear God. A man here, a Rev. Hampton-Evey, you 'll hear him harp on "fear God." Hypocrites may: honest sinners have no fear. And see the cause: they don't deceive themselves—that is why. Do you think we can love what we fear? They love God, or they disbelieve. And if they believe in Him, they know they can't conceal anything from Him. Honesty means piety: we can't be one without the other. And here are people—parsons—who talk of dying as *going* into the presence of our Maker, as if He had been all the while outside the world He created. Those parsons, I told the Rev. Hampton-Evey here, make infidels—they make a puzzle of their God. I 'm for a rational Deity. They preach up a supernatural eccentric. I don't say all: I 've heard good sermons, and met sound-headed clergymen—not like that gaping Hampton-Evey, when a woman tells him she thinks for herself. We have him sitting on our parish. A free-thinker startles him as a kind of demon; but a female free-thinker is one of Satan's concubines. He took it upon himself to reproach me—flung his glove at my feet, because I sent a cheque to a poor man punished for blasphemy. The man had the right to his opinions, and he had the courage of his opinions. I doubt whether the Rev. Hampton-Evey would go with a willing heart to prison for his. All the better for him if he comes head-up out of a trial. But now see: all these parsons and judges and mobcaps insist upon conformity. A man with common manly

courage comes before them, and he 's cast in penalties. Yet we know from history, in England, France, Germany, that the time of nonconformity brought out the manhood of the nation. Now, I say, a nation, to be a nation, must have men—I mean brave men. That 's what those hosts of female men combine to try to stifle. They won't succeed, but we shall want a war to teach the country the value of courage. You catch what I am driving at? They accuse my brother of immorality because he makes no pretence to be better than the men of his class.'

Weyburn's eyelids fluttered. Her kite-like ascent into the general, with the sudden drop on her choice morsel, switched his humour at the moment when he was respectfully considering that her dartings and gyrations had motive as much as the flight of the swallow for food. They had meaning; and here was one of the great ladies of the land who thought for herself, and was thoughtful for the country. If she came down like a bird winged, it was her love of her brother that did it. His look at Lady Charlotte glistened.

She raised her defences against the basilisk fascinating Philippa; and with a vow to keep them apart and deprive him of his chance, she relapsed upon the stiff frigidity which was not natural to her. It lasted long enough to put him on his guard under the seductions of a noble dame's condescension to a familiar tone. But, as he was too well bred to show the change in his mind for her change of manner, and as she was the sister of his boyhood's hero, and could be full of flavour, his eyes retained something of their sparkle. They were ready to lighten again, in the way peculiar to him, when she, quite forgetting her defence of Philippa, disburdened herself of her antagonisms and enthusiasms, her hates and her loves all round the neighbourhood and over the world, won to confidential communication by this young

man's face. She confessed as much, had he been guided to perceive it. She said, 'Arthur Abner's a reader of men: I can trust his word about them.'

Presently, it is true, she added: 'No man 's to be relied upon where there 's a woman.' She refused her implicit trust to saints—'if ever a man really was a saint before he was canonized!'

Her penetrative instinct of sex kindled the scepticism. Sex she saw at play everywhere, dogging the conduct of affairs, directing them at times; she saw it as the animation of nature, senselessly stigmatized, hypocritically concealed, active in our thoughts where not in our deeds; and the declining of the decorous to see it, or admit the sight, got them abhorred bad names from her, after a touch at the deadly poison coming of that blindness, or blindfoldedness, and a grimly melancholy shrug over the cruelties resulting—cruelties chiefly affecting women.

'You 're too young to have thought upon such matters,' she said, for a finish to them.

That was hardly true.

'I have thought,' said Weyburn, and his head fell to reckoning of the small sum of his thoughts upon them.

He was pulled up instantly for close inspection by the judge. 'What is your age?'

'I am in my twenty-sixth year.'

'You have been among men: have you studied women?'

'Not largely, Lady Charlotte. Opportunity has been wanting at French and German colleges.'

'It 's only a large and a close and a pretty long study of them that can teach you anything; and you must get rid of the poetry about them, and be sure you haven't lost it altogether. That 's what is called the golden

mean. I 'm not for the golden mean in every instance; it 's a way of exhorting to brutal selfishness. I grant it 's the right way in those questions. You 'll learn in time.' Her scanning gaze at the young man's face drove him along an avenue of his very possible chances of learning. 'Certain to. But don't tell me that at your age you have thought about women. You may say you have felt. A young man's feelings about women are better reading for him six or a dozen chapters further on. Then he can sift and strain. It won't be perfectly clear, but it will do.'

Mr. Eglett hereupon threw the door open, and ushered in Master Leo.

Lady Charlotte noticed that the tutor shook the boy's hand offhandedly, with not a whit of the usual obtrusive geniality, and merely dropped him a word. Soon after, he was talking to Mr. Eglett of games at home and games abroad. Poor fun over there! We head the world in field games, at all events. He drew a picture of a foreigner of his acquaintance looking on at football. On the other hand, French boys and German, having passed a year or two at an English school, get the liking for our games, and do a lot of good when they go home. The things we learn from them are to dance, to sing, and to study:—they are more in earnest than we about study. They teach us at fencing too. The tutor praised fencing as an exercise and an accomplishment. He had large reserves of eulogy for boxing. He knew the qualities of the famous bruisers of the time, cited fisty names, whose owners were then to be seen all over an admiring land in prints, in the glorious defensive-offensive attitude, England's own—Touch me, if you dare! with bullish, or bull-dog, or oak-bole fronts for the blow, handsome to pugilistic eyes.

The young tutor had lighted on a pet theme of Mr.

Eglett's—the excelling virtues of the practice of pugilism in Old England, and the school of honour that it is to our lower population. 'Fifty times better for them than cock-fighting,' he exclaimed, admitting that he could be an interested spectator at a ring or the pit: cock-fighting or ratting.

'Ratting seems to have more excuse,' the tutor said, and made no sign of a liking for either of those popular pastimes. As he disapproved without squeamishness, the impulsive but sharply critical woman close by nodded; and she gave him his dues for being no courtier.

Leo had to be off to bed. The tutor spared him any struggle over the shaking of hands, and saying, 'Good-night, Leo,' continued the conversation. The boy went away visibly relieved of the cramp that seizes on a youngster at the formalities pertaining to these chilly and fateful introductions.

'What do you think of the look of him?' Mr. Eglett asked.

The tutor had not appeared to inspect the boy. 'Big head,' he remarked. 'Yes, Leo won't want pushing at books when he 's once in harness. He will have six weeks of me. It 's more than the yeomanry get for drill per annum, and they 're expected to know something of a soldier's duties. There 's a chance of putting him on the right road in certain matters. We 'll walk, or ride, or skate, if the frost holds to-morrow: no lessons the first day.'

'Do as you think fit,' said Lady Charlotte.

The one defect she saw in the tutor did not concern his pupil. And a girl, if hit, would be unable to see that this tutor, judged as a man, was to some extent despicable for accepting tutorships, and, one might say, dishonouring the family of a soldier of rank and distinction, by coming into houses at the back way, with footing

enough to air his graces when once established there. He ought to have knocked at every door in the kingdom for help, rather than accept tutorships, and disturb households (or providently-minded mistresses of them) with all sorts of probably groundless apprehensions, founded naturally enough on the good looks he intrudes.

This tutor committed the offence next day of showing he had a firm and easy seat in the saddle, which increased Lady Charlotte's liking for him and irritated her watchful forecasts. She rode with the young man after lunch, 'to show him the country,' and gave him a taste of what he took for her variable moods. He misjudged her. Like a swimmer going through warm and cold springs of certain lake waters, he thought her a capricious ladyship, dangerous for intimacy, alluring to the deeps and gripping with cramps.

She pushed him to defend his choice of the tutor's profession.

'Think you understand boys?' she caught up his words; 'you can't. You can humour them, as you humour women. They 're just as hard to read. And don't tell me a young man can read women. Boys and women go on their instincts. Egyptologists can spell you hieroglyphs; they 'd be stumped, as Leo would say, to read a spider out of an inkpot over a sheet of paper.'

'One gets to interpret by degrees, by observing their habits,' the tutor said, and vexed her with a towering complacency under provocation that went some way further to melt the woman she was, while her knowledge of the softness warned her still more of the duty of playing dragon round such a young man in her house. The despot is alert at every issue, to every chance; and she was one, the wakefuller for being benevolent; her mind had no sleep by day.

For a month she subjected Mr. Matthew Weyburn to the microscope of her observation and the probe of her instinct. He proved that he could manage without cajoling a boy. The practical fact established, by agreement between herself and the unobservant gentleman who was her husband, Lady Charlotte allowed her meditations to drop an indifferent glance at the speculative views upon education entertained by this young tutor. To her mind they were flighty; but she liked him, and as her feelings dictated to her mind when she had not to think for others, she spoke of his views toleratingly, almost with an implied approval, after passing them through the form of burlesque to which she customarily treated things failing to waft her enthusiasm. In regard to Philippa, he behaved well: he bestowed more of his attention on Beatrice, nearer Leo's age, in talk about games and story-books and battles; nothing that he did when the girls were present betrayed the strutting plumed cock, bent to attract, or the sickly reptile, thirsty for a prize above him and meaning to have it, like Satan in Eden. Still, of course, he could not help his being a handsome fellow, having a vivid face and eyes transparent, whether blue or green, to flame of the brain exciting them; and that becomes a picture in the dream of girls—a picture creating the dream often. And Philippa had asked her grandmother, very ingenuously indeed, with a most natural candour, why 'they saw so little of Leo's hero.' Simple female child!

However, there was no harm done, and Lady Charlotte liked him. She liked few. Forthwith, in the manner of her particular head, a restless head, she fell to work at combinations.

Thus:—he is a nice young fellow, well bred, no cringing courtier, accomplished, good at classics, fairish at mathematics, a scholar in French, German, Italian, with a

shrewd knowledge of the different races, and with sound English sentiment too, and the capacity for writing good English, although in those views of his the ideas are unusual, therefore un-English, profoundly so. But his intentions are patriotic; they would not displease Lord Ormont. He has a worship of Lord Ormont. All we can say on behalf of an untried inferior is in that,—only the valiant admire devotedly. Well, he can write grammatical, readable English. What if Lord Ormont were to take him as a secretary while the Memoirs are in hand? He might help to chasten the sentences laughed at by those newspapers. Or he might, being a terrible critic of writing, and funny about styles, put it in an absurd light, that would cause the Memoirs to be tossed into the fire. He was made for the post of secretary! The young man's good looks would be out of harm's way then. If any sprig of womankind come across him there, it will, at any rate, not be a girl. Women must take care of themselves. Only the fools among them run to mischief in the case of a handsome young fellow.

Supposing a certain woman to be one of the fools? Lady Charlotte merely suggested it in the dashing current of her meditations—did not strike it out interrogatively. The woman would be a fine specimen among her class; that was all. For the favourite of Lord Ormont to stoop from her place beside him—ay, but women do; heroes have had the woeful experience of that fact. First we see them aiming themselves at their hero; next they are shooting an eye at the handsome man. The thirst of nature comes after that of their fancy, in conventional women. Sick of the hero tried, tired of their place in the market, no longer ashamed to acknowledge it, they begin to consult their own taste for beauty—they have it quite as much as the men have it; and when their

worshipped figure of manliness, in a romantic sombrero, is a threadbare giant, showing bruises, they sink on their inherent desire for a dance with the handsome man. And the really handsome man is the most extraordinary of the rarities. No wonder that when he appears he slays them, walks over them like a pestilence.

This young Weyburn would touch the fancy of a woman of a romantic turn. Supposing her enthusiastic in her worship of the hero, after a number of years—for anything may be imagined where a woman is concerned—why, another enthusiasm for the same object, and on the part of a stranger, a stranger with effective eyes, rapidly leads to sympathy. Suppose the reverse—the enthusiasm gone to dust, or become a wheezy old bellows, as it does where there 's disparity of age, or it frequently does—then the sympathy with a good-looking stranger comes more rapidly still.

These were Lady Charlotte's glances right and left—idle flights of the eye of a mounted Amazon across hedges at the canter along the main road of her scheme; which was to do a service to the young man she liked and to the brother she loved, for the marked advantage of both equally; perhaps for the chance of a little gossip to follow about that tenacious woman by whom her brother was held hard and fast, kept away from friends and relatives, isolated, insomuch as to have given up living on his estate—the old home!—because he would not disgrace it or incur odium by taking her there.

In consequence of Lord Ormont's resistance to pressure from her on two or three occasions, she chose to nurse and be governed by the maxim for herself: Never propose a plan to him, if you want it adopted. That was her way of harmlessly solacing love's vindictiveness for an injury.

She sent Arthur Abner a letter, thanking him for his

recommendation of young Mr. Weyburn, stating her benevolent wishes as regarded the young man and 'those hateful Memoirs,' requesting that her name should not be mentioned in the affair, because she was anxious on all grounds to have the proposal accepted by her brother. She could have vowed to herself that she wrote sincerely.

'He must want a secretary. He would be shy at an offer of one from me. Do you hint it, if you get a chance. You gave us Mr. Weyburn, and Mr. Eglett and I like him. Ormont would too, I am certain. You have obliged him before; this will be better than anything you have done for us. It will stop the Memoirs, or else give them a polish. Your young friend has made me laugh over stuff taken for literature until we put on our spectacles. Leo jogs along in harness now, and may do some work at school yet.'

Having posted her latter, she left the issue to chance, as we may when conscience is easy. An answer came the day before Weyburn's departure. Arthur Abner had met Lord Ormont in the street, had spoken of the rumour of Memoirs promised to the world, hinted at the possible need for a secretary; 'Lord Ormont would appoint a day to see Mr. Weyburn.'

Lady Charlotte considered that to be as good as the engagement.

'So we keep you in the family,' she said. 'And now look here: you ought to know my brother's ways, if you 're going to serve him. You 'll have to guess at half of everything he tells you; he 'll expect you to know the whole. There 's no man so secret. Why? He fears nothing; I can't tell why. And what his mouth shuts on, he exposes as if in his hand. Of course he 's proud, and good reason. You 'll see when you mustn't offend. A lady 's in the house—I hear of it. She takes his name,

they say. She may be a respectable woman—I 've heard no scandal. We have to hear of a Lady Ormont out of Society! We have to suppose it means there 's not to be a real one. He can't marry if he has allowed her to go about bearing his name. She has a fool of an aunt, I 'm told; as often in the house as not. Good proof of his fondness for the woman, if he swallows half a year of the aunt! Well, you won't, unless you 've mere man's eyes, be able to help seeing him trying to hide what he suffers from that aunt. He bears it, like the man he is; but woe to another betraying it! She has a tongue that goes like the reel of a rod, with a pike bolting out of the shallows to the snag he knows—to wind round it and defy you to pull. Often my brother Rowsley and I have fished the day long, and in hard weather, and brought home a basket; and he boasted of it more than of anything he has ever done since. That woman holds him away from me now. I say no harm of her. She may be right enough from her point of view; or it mayn't be owing to her. I wouldn't blame a woman. Well, but my point with you is, you swallow the woman's aunt—the lady's aunt—without betraying you suffer at all. Lord Ormont has eyes of an eagle for a speck above the surface. All the more because the aunt is a gabbling idiot does he—I say it seeing it—fire up to defend her from the sneer of the lip or half a sign of it! No, you would be on your guard; I can trust you. Of course you 'd behave like the gentleman you are where any kind of woman 's concerned; but you mustn't let a shadow be seen, think what you may. The woman—lady—calling herself Lady Ormont,—poor woman, I should do the same in her place,—she has a hard game to play; I have to be for my family: she has manners, I 'm told; holds herself properly. She fancies she brings him up to the altar, in the end, by decent behaviour.

That 's a delusion. It 's creditable to her, only she can't understand the claims of the family upon a man like my brother. When you have spare time—"kick-ups," he used to call it, writing to me from school—come here; you 're welcome, after three days' notice. I shall be glad to see you again. You 've gone some way to make a man of Leo.'

He liked her well: he promised to come. She was a sinewy bite of the gentle sex, but she had much flavour, and she gave nourishment.

'Let me have three days' notice,' she repeated.

'Not less, Lady Charlotte,' said he.

Weyburn received intimation from Arthur Abner of the likely day Lord Ormont would appoint, and he left Olmer for London to hold himself in readiness. Lady Charlotte and Leo drove him to meet the coach. Philippa, so strangely baffled in her natural curiosity, begged for a seat; she begged to be allowed to ride. Petitions were rejected. She stood at the window seeing 'Grandmama's tutor,' as she named him, carried off by grandmama. Her nature was avenged on her tyrant grandmama: it brought up almost to her tongue thoughts which would have remained subterranean, under control of her habit of mind, or the nursery's modesty, if she had been less tyrannically treated. They were subterranean thoughts, Nature's original, such as the sense of injustice will rouse in young women; and they are better unstirred, for they ripen girls over rapidly when they are made to revolve near the surface. It flashed on the girl why she had been treated tyrannically.

'Grandmama has good taste in tutors,' was all that she said while the thoughts rolled over.

CHAPTER IV

RECOGNITION

Our applicant for the post of secretary entered the street of Lord Ormont's London house, to present himself to his boyhood's hero by appointment.

He was to see, perhaps to serve, the great soldier. Things had come to this; and he thought it singular. But for the previous introduction to Lady Charlotte, he would have thought it passing wonderful. He ascribed it to the whirligig.

The young man was not yet of an age to gather knowledge of himself and of life from his present experience of the fact, that passionate devotion to an object strikes a vein through circumstances, as a travelling run of flame darts the seeming haphazard zigzags to catch at the dry of dead wood amid the damp; and when passion has become quiescent in the admirer, there is often the unsubsided first impulsion carrying it on. He will almost surely embrace his idol with one or other of the senses.

Weyburn still read the world as it came to him, by bits, marvelling at this and that, after the fashion of most of us. He had not deserted his adolescent's hero, or fallen upon analysis of a past season. But he was now a young man, stoutly and cognizantly on the climb, with a good aim overhead, and green youth's enthusiasms a step below his heels: one of the lovers of life, beautiful to behold, when we spy into them; generally their aspect is an enlivenment, whatever may be the carving of their features. For the sake of holy unity, this lover of life, whose gaze was to the front in hungry animation, held

fast to his young dreams, perceiving a soul of meaning in them, though the fire might have gone out; and he confessed to a past pursuit of delusions. Young men of this kind will have, for the like reason, a similar rational sentiment on behalf of our world's historic forward march, while admitting that history has to be taken from far backward if we would gain assurance of man's advance. It nerves an admonished ambition.

He was ushered into a London house's library, looking over a niggard enclosure of gravel and dull grass, against a wall where ivy dribbled. An armchair was beside the fireplace. To right and left of it a floreate company of books in high cases paraded shoulder to shoulder, without a gap, grenadiers on the line. Weyburn read the titles on their scarlet-and-blue facings. They were approved English classics; honoured veterans, who have emerged from the conflict with contemporary opinion, stamped excellent, or have been pushed by the roar of contemporaneous applauses to wear the leather-and-gilt uniform of our Immortals, until a more qualmish posterity disgorges them. The books had costly bindings. Lord Ormont's treatment of Literature appeared to resemble Lady Charlotte's, in being reverential and uninquiring. The books she bought to read were Memoirs of her time by dead men and women once known to her. These did fatigue duty in cloth or undress. It was high drill with all of Lord Ormont's books, and there was not a modern or a minor name among the regiments. They smelt strongly of the bookseller's lump lots by order; but if a show soldiery, they were not a sham, like a certain row of venerably-titled backs, that Lady Charlotte, without scruple, left standing to blow an ecclesiastical trumpet of empty contents; any one might have his battle of brains with them, for the turning of an absent key.

The door opened. Weyburn bowed to his old star in

human shape: a grey head on square shoulders, filling the doorway. He had seen at Olmer Lady Charlotte's treasured miniature portrait of her brother; a perfect likeness, she said—complaining the next instant of injustice done to the fire of his look.

Fire was low down behind the eyes at present. They were quick to scan and take summary of their object, as the young man felt while observing for himself. Height and build of body were such as might be expected in the brother of Lady Charlotte and from the tales of his prowess. Weyburn had a glance back at Cuper's boys listening to the tales.

The soldier-lord's manner was courteously military—that of an established superior indifferent to the deferential attitude he must needs exact. His curt nick of the head, for a response to the visitor's former salutation, signified the requisite acknowledgement, like a city creditor's busy stroke of the type-stamp receipt upon payment.

The ceremony over, he pitched a bugle voice to fit the contracted area: 'I hear from Mr. Abner that you have made acquaintance with Olmer. Good hunting country there.'

'Lady Charlotte kindly gave me a mount, my lord.'

'I knew your father by name—Colonel Sidney Weyburn. You lost him at Toulouse. We were in the Peninsula; I was at Talavera with him. Bad day for our cavalry.'

'Our officers were young at their work then.'

'They taught the Emperor's troops to respect a charge of English horse. It was teaching their fox to set traps for them.'

Lord Ormont indicated a chair. He stood.

'The French had good cavalry leaders,' Weyburn said, for cover to a continued study of the face.

'Montbrun, yes; Murat, Lassalle, Bessières. Under the Emperor they had.'

'You think them not at home in the saddle, my lord?'

'Frenchmen have nerves; horses *are* nerves. They pile excitement too high. When cool, they 're among the best. None of them had head for command of all the arms.'

'One might say the same of Seidlitz and Ziethen?'

'Of Ziethen. Seidlitz had a wider grasp, I suppose.' He pursed his mouth, pondering. 'No; and in the Austrian service, too; generals of cavalry are left to whistle for an independent command. There 's a jealousy of our branch!' The injured warrior frowned and hummed. He spoke his thought mildly: 'Jealousy of the name of soldier in this country! Out of the service, is the place to recommend. I 'd have advised a son of mine to train for a jockey rather than enter it. We deal with that to-morrow, in my papers. You come to me? Mr. Abner has arranged the terms? So I see you at ten in the morning. I am glad to meet a young man—Englishman—who takes an interest in the service.'

Weyburn fancied the hearing of a step; he heard the whispering dress. It passed him; a lady went to the armchair. She took her seat, as she had moved, with sedateness, the exchange of a toneless word with my lord. She was a *brune*. He saw that when he rose to do homage.

Lord Ormont resumed: 'Some are born to it, must be soldiers; and in peace they are snubbed by the heads; in war they are abused by the country. They don't understand in England how to treat an army; how to make one either!

'The gentleman—Mr. Weyburn: Mr. Arthur Abner's recommendation,' he added hurriedly, with a light wave of his hand and a murmur, that might be the lady's

title; continuing: 'A young man of military tastes should take service abroad. They 're in earnest about it over there. Here they play at it; and an army 's shipped to land without commissariat, ambulances, medical stores, and march against the odds, as usual—if it can march!'

'Albuera, my lord?'

'Our men can spurt, for a flick o' the whip. They 're expected to be constantly ready for doing prodigies—to repair the country's omissions. All the country cares for is to hope Dick Turpin may get to York. Our men are good beasts; they give the best in 'em, and drop. More 's the scandal to a country that has grand material and overtasks it. A blazing disaster ends the chapter!'

This was talk of an injured veteran. It did not deepen the hue of his ruddied skin. He spoke in the tone of matter of fact. Weyburn had been prepared for something of the sort by his friend, Arthur Abner. He noted the speaker's heightened likeness under excitement to Lady Charlotte. Excitement came at an early call of their voices to both; and both had handsome open features, bluntly cut, nothing of aquiline or the supercilious; eyes bluish-grey, in arched recesses, horny between the thick lids, lively to shoot their meaning when the trap-mouth was active; effectively expressing promptitude for combat, pleasure in attack, wrestle, tug, whatever pertained to strife; an absolute sense of their right.

As there was a third person present at this discussion of military topics, the silence of the lady drew Weyburn to consult her opinion in her look.

It was on him. Strange are the woman's eyes which can unoffendingly assume the privilege to dwell on such a living object as a man without becoming gateways for

his return look, and can seem in pursuit of thoughts while they enfold. They were large dark eyes, eyes of southern night. They sped no shot; they rolled forth an envelopment. A child among toys, taught to think of other toys, may gaze in that way. But these were a woman's eyes.

He gave Lord Ormont his whole face, as an auditor should. He was interested besides, as he told a ruffled conscience. He fell upon the study of his old hero determinedly.

The pain of a memory waking under pillows, unable to do more than strain for breath, distracted his attention. There was a memory: that was all he knew. Or else he would have lashed himself for hanging on the beautiful eyes of a woman. To be seeing and hearing his old hero was wonder enough.

Recollections of Lady Charlotte's plain hints regarding the lady present resolved to the gross retort, that her eyes were beautiful. And he knew them—there lay the strangeness. They were known beautiful eyes, in a foreign land of night and mist.

Lord Ormont was discoursing with racy eloquence of our hold on India: his views in which respect were those of Cuper's boys. Weyburn ventured a dot-running description of the famous ride, and out flew an English soldier's grievance. But was not the unjustly-treated great soldier well rewarded, whatever the snubs and the bitterness, with these large dark eyes in his house, for his own? Eyes like these are the beginning of a young man's world; they nerve, inspire, arm him, colour his life; he would labour, fight, die for them. It seemed to Weyburn a blessedness even to behold them. So it had been with him at the early stage; and his heart went swifter, memory fetched a breath. Memory quivered eyelids, when the thought returned—of his

having known eyes as lustrous. First lights of his world, they had more volume, warmth, mystery—were sweeter. Still, these in the room were sisters to them. They quickened throbs; they seemed a throb of the heart made visible.

That was their endowment of light and lustre simply, and the mystical curve of the lids. For so they could look only because the heart was disengaged from them. They were but heavenly orbs.

The lady's elbow was on an arm of her chair, her forefinger at her left temple. Her mind was away, one might guess; she could hardly be interested in talk of soldiering and of foreign army systems, jealous English authorities and officials, games, field-sports. She had personal matters to think of.

Adieu until to-morrow to the house she inhabited! The street was a banishment and a relief when Weyburn's first interview with Lord Ormont was over.

He rejoiced to tell his previous anticipations that he had not been disappointed; and he bade hero-worshippers expect no gilded figure. We gather heroes as we go, if we are among the growing: our constancy is shown in the not discarding of our old ones. He held to his earlier hero, though he had seen him, and though he could fancy he saw round him.

Another, too, had been a hero-lover. How did that lady of night's eyes come to fall into her subjection?

He put no question as to the name she bore; it hung in a black suspense—vividly at its blackest illuminated her possessor. A man is a hero to some effect who wins a woman like this; and, if his glory bespells her, so that she flings all to the winds for him, burns the world; if, for solely the desperate rapture of belonging to him, she consents of her free will to be one of the nameless and discoloured, he shines in a way to make the marrow of

men thrill with a burning envy. For that must be the idolatrous devotion desired by them all.

Weyburn struck down upon his man's nature—the bad in us, when beauty of woman is viewed; or say, the old original revolutionary, best kept untouched; for a touch or a meditative pause above him, fetches him up to roam the civilized world devouringly and lawlessly. It is the special peril of the young lover of life, that an inflammability to beauty in women is in a breath intense with him. He is, in truth, a thinly-sealed volcano of our imperishable ancient father, and has it in him to be the multitudinously-amorous of the mythologic Jove. Give him head, he can be civilization's devil. Is she fair and under a shade?—then is she doubly fair. The shadow about her secretes mystery, just as the forest breeds romance: and mystery is a measureless realm. If we conceive it, we have a mysterious claim on her who is the heart of it.

He marched on that road to the music of sonorous brass for some drunken minutes.

The question came, What of the man who takes advantage of her self-sacrifice?

It soon righted him, and he did Lord Ormont justice, and argued the case against Lady Charlotte's naked hints.

This dark-eyed heroine's bearing was assured, beyond an air of dependency. Her deliberate short nod to him at his leave-taking, and the toneless few words she threw to my lord, signified sufficiently that she did not stand defying the world or dreading it.

She had by miracle the eyes which had once charmed him—could again—would always charm. She reminded him of Aminta Farrell's very eyes under the couchant-dove brows—something of her mouth, the dimple running from a corner. She had, as Aminta had, the self-collected

and self-cancelled look, a realm in a look, that was neither depth nor fervour, nor a bestowal, nor an allurement; nor was it an exposure, though there seemed no reserve. One would be near the meaning in declaring it to bewilder men with the riddle of openhandedness. We read it—all may read it—as we read inexplicable plain life; in which let us have a confiding mind, despite the blows at our heart, and some understanding will enter us.

He shut the door upon picture and speculations, returning to them by another door. The lady had not Aminta's freshness: she might be taken for an elder sister of Aminta. But Weyburn wanted to have her position defined before he set her beside Aminta. He writhed under Lady Charlotte's tolerating scorn of 'the young woman.' It roused an uneasy sentiment of semi-hostility in the direction of my lord; and he had no personal complaint to make.

Lord Ormont was cordial on the day of the secretary's installation; as if—if one might dare to guess it—some one had helped him to a friendly judgement.

The lady of Aminta's eyes was absent at the luncheon table. She came into the room a step, to speak to Lord Ormont, dressed for a drive to pay a visit.

The secretary was unnoticed.

Lord Ormont put inquiries to him at table, for the why of his having avoided the profession of arms; and apparently considered that the secretary had made a mistake, and that he would have committed a greater error in becoming a soldier—'in this country.' A man with a grievance is illogical under his burden. He mentioned the name 'Lady Ormont' distinctly during some remarks on travel. Lady Ormont preferred the Continent.

Two days later she came to the armchair, as before,

met Weyburn's eyes when he raised them; gave him no home in hers—not a temporary shelter from the pelting of interrogations. She hardly spoke. Why did she come?

But how was it that he was drawn to think of her? Absent or present, she was round him, like the hills of a valley. She was round his thoughts—caged them; however high, however far they flew, they were conscious of her.

She took her place at the midday meal. She had Aminta's voice in some tones; a mellower than Aminta's —the voice of one of Aminta's family. She had the trick of Aminta's upper lip in speaking. Her look on him was foreign; a civil smile as they conversed. She was very much at home with my lord, whom she rallied for his addiction to his Club at a particular hour of the afternoon. She conversed readily. She reminded him incidentally that her aunt would arrive early next day. He informed her, some time after, of an engagement 'to tiffin with a brother officer,' and she nodded.

They drove away together while the secretary was at his labour of sorting the heap of autobiographical scraps in a worn dispatch-box, pen and pencil jottings tossed to swell the mass when they had relieved an angry reminiscence. He noticed, heedlessly at the moment, feminine handwriting on some few clear sheets among them.

Next day he was alone in the library. He sat before the box, opened it and searched, merely to quiet his annoyance for having left those sheets of the fair amanuensis unexamined. They were not discoverable. They had gone.

He stood up at the stir of the door. It was she, and she acknowledged his bow; she took her steps to her chair.

He was informed that Lord Ormont had an engagement, and he remarked, 'I can do the work very well.' She sat quite silent.

He read first lines of the scraps, laid them in various places, as in a preparation for conjurer's tricks at cards; refraining from a glance, lest he should disconcert the eyes he felt to be on him fitfully.

At last she spoke, and he knew Aminta in his hearing and sight.

'Is Emile Grenat still anglomane?'

An instant before her voice was heard he had been persuading himself that the points of unlikeness between his young Aminta and this tall and stately lady of the proud reserve in her bearing flouted the resemblance.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH THE SHADES OF BROWNY AND MATEY ADVANCE AND RETIRE

'Emile is as anglomane as ever, and not a bit less a Frenchman,' Weyburn said, in a tone of one who muffles a shock at the heart.

'It would be the poorer compliment to us,' she rejoined.

They looked at one another; she dropped her eyelids, he looked away.

She had the grand manner by nature. She was the woman of the girl once known.

'A soldier, is he?'

'Emile's profession and mine are much alike, or will be.'

'A secretary?'

Her deadness of accent was not designed to carry her opinion of the post of secretary.

It brought the reply: 'We hope to be schoolmasters.'

She drew in a breath; there was a thin short voice, hardly voice, as when one of the unschooled minor feelings has been bruised. After a while she said—

'Does he think it a career?'

'Not brilliant.'

'He was formed for a soldier.'

'He had to go as the road led.'

'A young man renouncing ambition!'

'Considering what we can do best.'

'It signifies the taste for what he does.'

'Certainly that.'

Weyburn had senses to read the word 'schoolmaster' in repetition behind her shut mouth. He was sharply sensible of a fall.

The task with his papers occupied him. If he had a wish, it was to sink so low in her esteem as to be spurned. A kick would have been a refreshment. Yet he was unashamed of the cause invoking it. We are instruments to the touch of certain women, and made to play strange tunes.

'Mr. Cuper flourishes?'

'The school exists. I have not been down there. I met Mr. Shalders yesterday. He has left the school.'

'You come up from Olmer?'

'I was at Olmer last week, Lady Ormont.'

An involuntary beam from her eyes thanked him for her title at that juncture of the dialogue. She grew more spirited.

'Mr. Shalders has joined the Dragoons, has he?'

'The worthy man has a happy imagination. He goes through a campaign daily.'

'It seems to one to dignify his calling.'

'I like his enthusiasm.'

The lady withdrew into her thoughts; Weyburn fell upon his work.

Mention of the military cloak of enthusiasm covering Shalders, brought the scarce credible old time to smite at his breast, in the presence of these eyes. A ringing of her title of Lady Ormont rendered the present time the incredible.

'I can hardly understand a young Frenchman's not entering the army,' she said.

'The Napoleonic legend is weaker now,' said he.

'The son of an officer!'

'Grandson.'

'It was his choice to be,—he gave it up without reluctance?'

'Emile obeyed the command of his parents,' Weyburn answered; and he was obedient to the veiled direction of her remark, in speaking of himself: 'I had a reason, too.'

'One wonders!'

'It would have impoverished my mother's income to put aside a small allowance for me for years. She would not have hesitated. I then set my mind on the profession of schoolmaster.'

'Emile Grenat was a brave boy. Has he no regrets?'

'Neither of us has a regret.'

'He began ambitiously.'

'It 's the way at the beginning.'

'It is not usually abjured.'

'I 'm afraid we neither of us "dignify our calling" by discontent with it!'

A dusky flush, worth seeing, came on her cheeks. 'I respect enthusiasms,' she said, and it was as good to him to hear as the begging pardon, though clearly she could not understand enthusiasm for the schoolmaster's career.

Light of evidence was before him, that she had a friendly curiosity to know what things had led to their new meeting under these conditions. He sketched them cursorily; there was little to tell—little, that is, appealing to a romantic mind for interest. Aware of it, by sympathy, he degraded the narrative to a flatness about as cheering as a suburban London Sunday's promenade. Sympathy caused the perverseness. He felt her disillusionment, felt with it and spread a feast of it. She had to hear of studies at Caen and at a Paris Lycée; French fairly mastered; German, the same; Italian, the same; after studies at Heidelberg, Asti, and Florence; between four and five months at Athens (he was needlessly precise), in tutorship with a young nobleman: no events, nor a spot of colour. Thus did he wilfully, with pain to himself, put an extinguisher on the youth painted brilliant and eminent in a maiden's imagination.

'So there can no longer be thought of the army,' she remarked; and the remark had a sort of sigh, though her breathing was equable.

'Unless a big war knocks over all rules and the country comes praying us to serve,' he said.

'You would not refuse then?'

'Not in case of need. One may imagine a crisis when they would give commissions to men of my age or older for the cavalry—heavy losses of officers.'

She spoke, as if urged by a sting to revert to the distasteful: 'That profession—must you not take . . . enter into orders if you would . . . if you aim at any distinction?'

'And a member of the Anglican Church would not be allowed to exchange his frock for a cavalry sabre,' said he. 'That is true. I do not propose to settle as a schoolmaster in England.'

'Where?'

'On the Continent.'

'Would not America be better?'

'It would not so well suit the purpose in view for us.'

'There are others besides?'

'Besides Emile, there is a German and an Italian and a Swiss.'

'It is a Company?'

'A Company of schoolmasters! Companies of all kinds are forming. Colleges are Companies. And they have their collegians. Our aim is at pupils; we have no ambition for any title higher than School and Schoolmaster; it is not a Company.'

So, like Nature parading her skeleton to youthful adorers of her face, he insisted on reducing to hideous material wreck the fair illusion, which had once arrayed him in alluring promise.

She explained: 'I said, America. You would be among Protestants in America.'

'Catholics and Protestants are both welcome to us, according to our scheme. And Germans, French, English, Americans, Italians, if they will come; Spaniards and Portuguese, and Scandinavians, Russians as well. And Jews; Mohammedans too, if only they will come! The more mixed, the more it hits our object.'

'You have not stated where on the Continent it is to be.'

'The spot fixed on is in Switzerland.'

'You will have scenery.'

'I hold to that, as an influence.'

A cool vision of the Bernese Alps encircled the young schoolmaster; and she said, 'It would influence girls, I dare say.'

'A harder matter with boys, of course—at first. We think we may make it serve.'

'And where is the spot? Is that fixed on?'

'Fifteen miles from Berne, on elevated land, neighbouring a water, not quite to be called a lake, unless in an auctioneer's advertisement.'

'I am glad of the lake. I could not look on a country home where there was no swimming. You will be head of the school.'

'There must be a head.'

'Is the school likely to be established soon?'

He fell into her dead tone: 'Money is required for establishments. I have a Reversion coming some day; I don't dabble in *post obits*.'

He waited for further questions. They were at an end.

'You have your work to do, Mr. Weyburn.'

Saying that, she bowed an implied apology for having kept him from it, and rose. She bowed again as she passed through the doorway, in acknowledgement of his politeness.

Here, then, was the end of the story of Browny and Matey. Such was his thought under the truncheon-stroke of their colloquy. Lines of Browny's letters were fiery waving ribands about him, while the coldly gracious bow of the Lady wrote Finis.

The gulf between the two writings remained unsounded. It gave a heave to the old passion, but stirred no new one; he had himself in hand now, and he shut himself up when the questions bred of amazement buzzed and threatened to storm. After all, what is not curious in this world? The curious thing would be if curious things should fail to happen. Men have been saying it since they began to count and turn corners. And let us hold off from speculating when there is or but seems a shadow of unholiness over that mole-like business. There shall be no questions; and as to feelings, the same. They, if petted for a moment beneath the shadow, corrupt our

blood. Weyburn was a man to have them by the throat at the birth.

Still they thronged; heavy work of strangling had to be done. Her tone of disappointment with the schoolmaster bit him, and it flattered him. The feelings leapt alive, equally venomous from the wound and the caress. They pushed to see, had to be repelled from seeing, the girl Browny in the splendid woman; they had lightning memories: not the pain of his grip could check their voice on the theme touching her happiness or the reverse. And this was an infernal cunning. He paused perforce to inquire, giving them space for the breeding of their multitudes. Was she happy? Did she not seem too meditative, enclosed, toneless, at her age? Vainly the persecuted fellow said to himself: 'But what is it to me now?'—The Browny days were over. The passion for the younger Aminta was over—buried; and a dream of power belonging to those days was not yet more than visionary. It had moved her once, when it was a young soldier's. She treated the schoolmaster's dream as vapour, and the old days as dead and ghostless. She did rightly. How could they or she or he be other than they were!

With that sage exclamation, he headed into the Browny days and breasted them; and he had about him the living foamy sparkle of the very time, until the Countess of Ormont breathed the word 'Schoolmaster'; when, at once, it was dusty land where buoyant waters had been, and the armies of the facts, in uniform drab, with some feathers and laces, and a significant surpliced figure, decorously covering the wildest of Cupids, marched the standard of the winking gold-piece, which is their nourishing sun and eclipser of all suns that foster dreams.

As you perceive, he was drawing swiftly to the

vortex of the fools, and round and round he went, lucky to float.

His view of the business of the schoolmaster plucked him from the whirl. She despised it; he upheld it. He stuck to his view, finding their antagonism on the subject wholesome for him. All that she succeeded in doing was to rob it of the aurora colour clothing everything in which Matey Weyburn set his aim. Her contempt of it, whether as a profession in itself or as one suitable to the former young enthusiast for arms, dwarfed it to appear like the starved plants under Greenland skies. But those are of a sturdy genus; they mean to live; they live, perforce, of the right to live; they will prove their right in a coming season, when some one steps near and wonders at them, and from more closely observing, gets to understand, learning that the significance and the charm of earth will be as well shown by them as by her tropical fair flaunters or the tenderly-nurtured exotics.

An unopened coffer of things to be said in defence of —no, on behalf of—no, in honour of the Profession of Schoolmaster, perhaps to the covincing of Aminta, Lady Ormont, was glanced at; a sentence or two leapt out and stepped forward, and had to retire. He preferred to the fathering of tricky, windy phrases, the being undervalued—even by her. He was taught to see again how Rhetoric haunts, and Rhetoric bedevils, the vindication of the clouded, especially in the case of a disesteemed Profession requiring one to raise it and impose it upon the antagonistic senses for the bewildering of the mind. One has to sound it loudly; there is no treating it, as in the advocacy of the cases of flesh and blood, with the masterly pathos of designed simplicity. And Weyburn was Cuper's Matey Weyburn still in his loathing of artifice to raise emotion, loathing

of the affected, the stilted, the trumpet of speech—always excepting school-exercises in the tongues, the unmasking of a Catiline, the address of a General, Athenian or other, to troops.

He kept his coffer shut; and, for a consequence, he saw the contents as an avenue of blossom leading to vistas of infinite harvest.

She was Lady Ormont: Aminta shared the title of his old hero! He refused to speculate upon how it had come to pass, and let the curtain hang, though dramas and romances, with the miracles involved in them, were agitated by a transient glimpse at the curtain.

Well! and he hoped to be a member of the Profession she despised: hoped it with all his heart. And one good effect of his giving his heart to the hope was, that he could hold from speculating and from feeling, even from pausing to wonder at the most wonderful turn of events. Blessed antagonism drove him to be braced by thoughts upon the hardest of the schoolmaster's tasks—bright winter thoughts, prescribing to him satisfaction with a faith in the sowing, which may be his only reaping. Away fly the boys in sheaves. After his toil with them, to instruct, restrain, animate, point their minds, they leave him, they plunge into the world and are gone. Will he see them again? It is a flickering perhaps. To sustain his belief that he has done serviceable work, he must be sure of his having charged them with good matter. How can the man do it, if, during his term of apprenticeship, he has allowed himself to dally here and there, down to moony dreamings over inscrutable beautiful eyes of a married lady; for the sole reason that he meets her unexpectedly, after an exchange of letters with her in long-past days at school, when she was an inexperienced girl, who knew not what she vowed, and he

a flighty-headed youngster, crying out to be the arrow of any bow that was handy? Yes, she was once that girl, named Browny by the boys.

Temptation threw warm light on the memory, and very artfully, by conjuring up the faces, cries, characters, all the fun of the boys. There was no possibility of forgetting her image in those days; he had, therefore, to live with it and to live near the grown woman—Time's present answer to the old riddle. It seemed to him, that instead of sorting Lord Ormont's papers, he ought to be at sharp exercise. According to his prescript, sharp exercise of lungs and limbs is a man's moral aid against temptation. He knew it as the one trusty antidote for him, who was otherwise the vessel of a temperament pushing to mutiny. Certainly it is the best philosophy youth can pretend to practise; and Lord Ormont kept him from it! Worse than that, the slips and sheets of paper in the dispatch-box were not an exercise of the mind even; there was nothing to grapple with—no diversion; criticism passed by them indulgently, if not benevolently.

Quite apart from the subject inscribed on them, Weyburn had now and again a blow at the breast, of untraceable origin. For he was well enough aware that the old days when Browny imagined him a hero, in drinking his praises of a brighter, were drowned. They were dead; but here was she the bride of the proved hero. His praises might have helped in causing her willingness—devotional readiness, he could fancy—to yield her hand. Perhaps at the moment when the hero was penning some of the Indian slips here, the boy at school was preparing Aminta; but he could not be responsible for a sacrifice of the kind suggested by Lady Charlotte. And no, there had been no such sacrifice, although Lord Ormont's inexplicable treatment of his

young countess, under cover of his notorious reputation with women, conduced to the suspicion.

While the vagrant in Weyburn was thus engaged, his criticism of the soldier-lord's field-English on paper let the stuff go tolerantly unexamined, but with a degree of literary contempt at heart for the writer who had that woman-scented reputation and expressed himself so poorly. The sentiment was outside of reason. We do, nevertheless, expect our Don Juans to deliver their minds a trifle elegantly, if not in classic English, on paper; and when we find one of them inflicting cruelty, as it appears, and the victim is a young woman, a beautiful young woman, she pleads to us poetically against the bearish sentences of his composition. We acknowledge, however, that a mere sentiment, entertained possibly by us alone, should not be permitted to condemn him unheard.

Lady Ormont was not seen again. After luncheon at a solitary table, the secretary worked till winter's lamps were lit; and then shone freedom, with assurance to him that he would escape from the miry mental ditch he had been floundering in since Aminta revealed herself. Sunday was the glorious day to follow, with a cleansing bath of a walk along the southern hills; homely English scenery to show to a German friend, one of his 'Company.' Half a dozen good lads were pledged to the walk; bearing which in view, it could be felt that this nonsensical puzzlement over his relations to the moods and tenses of a married woman would be bounced out of recollection before nightfall. The landscape given off any of the airy hills of Surrey would suffice to do it.

A lady stood among her boxes below, as he descended the stairs to cross the hall. He knew her for the person Lady Charlotte called 'the woman's aunt,' whom Lord

Ormont could not endure—a forgiven old enemy, Mrs. Nargett Pagnell.

He saluted. She stared, and corrected her incivility with 'Ah, yes,' and a formal smile.

If not accidentally delayed on her journey, she had been needlessly the cause why Lord Ormont hugged his Club during the morning and afternoon. Weyburn was pushed to think of the matter by remembrance of his foregone resentment at her having withdrawn Aminta from Miss Vincent's three days earlier than the holiday time. The resentment was over; but a germ of it must have sprung from the dust to prompt the kindling leap his memory took, out of all due connection, like a lightning among the crags. It struck Aminta smartly. He called to mind the conversation at table yesterday. Had she played on Lord Ormont's dislike of the aunt to drive him forth for some purpose of her own? If so, the little trick had been done with deplorable spontaneity or adeptness of usage. What was the purpose?—to converse with an old acquaintance, undisturbed by Lord Ormont and her aunt? Neatly done, supposing the surmise correct.

But what was there in the purpose? He sifted rapidly for the gist of the conversation; reviewed the manner of it, the words, the sound they had, the feelings they touched; then owned that the question could not be answered. Owning, further, that the recurrence of these idiotic speculations, feelings, questions, wrote him down as both dull fellow and impertinent, he was enabled to restore Aminta to the queenly place she took above the schoolmaster, who was very soon laughing at his fever or flush of the afternoon. The day had brought a great surprise, nothing more. Twenty minutes of fencing in the *salle d'armes* of an Italian captain braced him to health, and shifted scenes of other loves, lighter loves,

following the Browny days—not to be called loves; in fact, hardly beyond inclinations. Nevertheless, inclinations are an infidelity. To meet a married woman, and be mooning over her because she gave him her eyes and her handwriting when a girl, was enough to rouse an honest fellow's laugh at himself, in the contemplation of his intermediate amorous vagabondage. Had he ever known the veritable passion after Browny sank from his ken? Let it be confessed, never. His first love was his only true love, despite one shuddering episode, oddly humiliating to recollect, though he had not behaved badly. So, then, by right of his passion, thus did eternal justice rule it: that Browny belonged to Matey Weyburn, Aminta to Lord Ormont. Aminta was a lady blooming in the flesh, Browny was the past's pale phantom; for which reason he could call her his own, without harm done to any one, and with his usual appetite for dinner, breakfast, lunch, whatever the meal supplied by the hour.

It would somewhat alarmingly have got to Mr. Weyburn's conscience through a disturbance of his balance, telling him that he was on a perilous road, if his relish for food had been blunted. He had his axiom on the subject, and he was wrong in the general instance, for the appetites of rogues and ogres are not known to fail. As regarded himself, he was eminently right; and he could apply it to boys also, to all young people—the unlaunched, he called them. He counted himself among the launched, no doubt, and had breasted seas; but the boy was alive, a trencherman lad, in the coming schoolmaster, and told him profitable facts concerning his condition, besides throwing a luminous ray on the arcana of our elusive youthful. If they have no stout zest for eating, put QUERY against them.

His customary enjoyment of dinner convinced Mr.

Weyburn that he had not brooded morbidly over his phantom Browny, and could meet Aminta, Countess of Ormont, on the next occasion with the sentiments proper to a common official. Did she not set him a commendable example? He admired her for not concealing her disdain of the aspirant schoolmaster, quite comprehending, by sympathy, why the woman should reproach the girl who had worshipped heroes, if this was a full-grown specimen; and the reply of the shamed girl, that in her ignorance she could not know better. He spared the girl, but he laughed at the woman he commended, laughed at himself.

Aminta's humour was being stirred about the same time. She and her aunt were at the dinner-table in the absence of my lord. The dinner had passed with the stiff dialogue peculiar to couples under supervision of their inferiors; and, as soon as the room was clear, she had asked her aunt, touching the secretary: 'Have you seen him?'

Mrs. Nargett Pagnell's answer could have been amusing only to one whose intimate knowledge of her found it characteristically salt; for she was a lady of speech addressed ever directly or roundabout to the chief point of business between herself and her hearer, and the more she was brief, oblique, far-shooting, the more comically intelligible she was to her niece. She bent her head to signify that she had seen the secretary, and struck the table with both hands, exclaiming:

'Well, to be sure, Lord Ormont!'

Their discussion, before they descended the stairs to dinner, concerned his lordship's extraordinary indifference to the thronging of handsome young men around his young countess.

Here, the implication ran, is one established in the house.

Aminta's thoughts could be phrased: 'Yes, that is true, for one part of it.'

As for the other part, the assent of a Phœbus Apollo, with his golden bow and quiver off the fairest of Eastern horizon skies, followed suddenly by the sight of him toppling over in Mr. Cuper's long-skirted brown coat, with spectacles and cane, is an image that hardly exceeds the degradation she conceived. It was past ludicrous; yet admitted of no woefulness, nothing soothingly pathetic. It smothered and barked at the dreams of her blooming spring of life, to which her mind had latterly been turning back, for an escape from sour, one may say cynical, reflections, the present issue of a beautiful young woman's first savour of battle with the world.

CHAPTER VI

IN A MOOD OF LANGUOR

Up in Aminta's amber dressing-room, Mrs. Nargett Pagnell alluded sadly to the long month of separation, and begged her niece to let her have in plain words an exact statement of the present situation; adding, 'Items will do.' Thereupon she slipped into prattle and held the field.

She was the known, worthy, good, intolerable woman whom the burgess turns out for his world in regiments, that do and look and all but step alike; and they mean well, and have conventional worships and material aspirations, and very peculiar occult refinements, with a blind head and a haphazard gleam of acuteness, impressive to acquaintances, convincing themselves that they impersonate sagacity. She had said this, done that; and it

was, by proof, Providence consenting, the right thing. A niece, written down in her girlhood, because of her eyes and her striking air and excellent deportment, as mate for a nobleman, marries him before she is out of her teens. I said, 'She shall be a countess.' A countess she is. Providence does not comply with our predictions in order to stultify us. Admitting the position of affairs for the moment as extraordnary, we are bound by what has happened to expect they will be conformable in the end. Temporarily warped, we should say of them.

She could point to the reason: it was Lord Ormont's blunt misunderstanding of her character. The burgess's daughter was refining to an appreciation of the exquisite so rapidly that she could criticize patricians. My lord had never forgiven her for correcting him in his pronunciation of her name by marriage. Singular indeed; but men, even great men, men of title, are so, some of them, whom you could least suspect of their being so. He would speak the 'g' in Nargett, and he declined—after a remonstrance he declined—to pass Pagnell under the cedilla. Lord Ormont spoke the name like a man hating it, or an English rustic: 'Nargett Pagnell,' instead of the soft and elegant 'Naryett Pagñell,' the only true way of speaking it; and she had always taken that pronunciation of her name for a test of people's breeding. The expression of his lordship's countenance under correction was memorable. Naturally, in those honeymoony days, the young Countess of Ormont sided with her husband the earl; she declared that her aunt had never dreamed of the cedilla before the expedition to Spain. When, for example, Alfred Nargett Pagnell had a laughing remark, which Aminta in her childhood must have heard: 'We rhyme with spaniel!'

That was the secret of Lord Ormont's prepossession against Aminta's aunt; and who can tell? perhaps of

much of his behaviour to the beautiful young wife he at least admired, sincerely admired, though he caused her to hang her head—cast a cloud on the head so dear to him!

Otherwise there was no interpreting his lordship. To think of herself as personally disliked by a nobleman stupefied Mrs. Pagnell, from her just expectation of reciprocal dealings in high society; for she confessed herself a fly to a title. Where is the shame, if titles are created to attract? Elsewhere than in that upper circle, we may anticipate hard bargains; the widow of a solicitor had not to learn it. But when a distinguished member and ornament of the chosen seats above blew cold upon their gesticulatory devotee, and was besides ungrateful, she was more than commonly assured of his being, as she called him, 'a sphinx.' His behaviour to his legally-wedded wife confirmed the charge.

She checked her flow to resume the question. 'So, then, where are we now? He allows you liberally for pin-money in addition to your own small independent income. Satisfaction with that would warrant him to suppose his whole duty done by you.'

'We are where we were, aunty; the month has made no change,' said Aminta, in languor.

'And you as patient as ever?'

'I am supposed to have everything a woman can require.'

'Can he possibly think it? And I have to warn you, child, that lawyers are not so absolving as the world is with some of the ladies Lord Ormont allows you to call your friends. I have been hearing—it is not mere airy tales one hears from lawyers about cases in Courts of Law. Tighten your lips as you like; I say nothing to condemn or reflect on Mrs. Lawrence Finchley. I have had my eyes a little opened, that is all. Oh, I know my

niece Aminta, when it 's a friend to stand by; but our position—thanks to your inscrutable lord and master—demands of us the utmost scrupulousness, or it soon becomes a whirl and scandal flying about, and those lawyers picking up and putting together. I have had a difficulty to persuade them! . . . and my own niece! whom I saw married at the British Embassy in Madrid, as I take good care to tell everybody; for it was my doing; I am the responsible person! and by an English Protestant clergyman, to all appearance able to walk erect in and out of any of these excellent new Life Assurance offices they are starting for the benefit of widows and orphans, and deceased within six days of the ceremony —if ceremony one may call the hasty affair in those foreign places. My dear, the instant I heard it I had a presentiment, "All has gone well up to now." I remember murmuring the words. Then your letter, received in that smelly Barcelona: Lord Ormont was carrying you off to Granada—a dream of my infancy! It may not have been his manœuvre, but it was the beginning of his manœuvres.'

Aminta shuddered. 'And tra-la-la, and castañets, and my Cid! my Cid! and the Alhambra, the Sierra Nevada, and ay di me, Alhama; and Boabdil el Chico and el Zagal and Fray Antonio Agapida!' She flung out the rattle, yawning, with her arms up and her head back, in the posture of a woman wounded. One of her aunt's chance shots had traversed her breast, flashing at her the time, the scene, the husband, intensest sunniness on sword-edges of shade,—and now the wedded riddle, illusion dropping mask, romance in its anatomy, cold English mist. Ah, what a background is the present when we have the past to the fore! That filmy past is diaphanous on heaving ribs.

She smiled at the wide-eyed little gossip. 'Don't

speak of manœuvres, dear aunt. And we 'll leave Granada to the poets. I 'm tired. Talk of our own people, on your side and my father's, and as much as you please of the Pagnell-Pagñells, they refresh me. Do they go on marrying?'

'Why, my child, how could they go on without it?'

Aminta pressed her hands at her eyelids. 'Oh, me!' she sighed, feeling the tear come with a sting from checked laughter. 'But there are marriages, aunty, that don't go on, though Protestant clergymen officiated. Leave them unnoticed, I have really nothing to tell.'

'You have not heard anything of Lady Eglett?'

'Lady Charlotte Eglett? No syllable. Or wait—my lord's secretary was with her at Olmer; approved by her, I have to suppose.'

'There, my dear, I say again I do dread that woman, if she can make a man like Lord Ormont afraid of her. And no doubt she is of our old aristocracy. And they tell me she is coarse in her conversation—like a man. Lawyers tell me she is never happy but in litigation. Years back, I am given to understand, she did not set so particularly good an example. Lawyers hear next to everything. I am told she lifted her horsewhip on a gentleman once, and then put her horse at him and rode him down. You will say, the sister of your husband. No; not to make my niece a countess, would I, if I had known the kind of family! Then one asks: Is she half as much afraid of him? In that case, no wonder they have given up meeting. Was formerly one of the Keepsake Beauties. Well, Lady Eglett! and Aminta, Countess of Ormont, will be in that Peerage, as they call it, let her only have her dues. My dear, I would—if I ever did—swear the woman is jealous.'

'Of me, aunty!'

'I say more; I say again, it would be a good thing

for somebody if somebody had his twitch of jealousy. Wives may be too meek. Cases and cases my poor Alfred read to me, where an ill-behaving man was brought to his senses by a clever little shuffle of the cards, and by the most innocent of wives. A kind of poison to him, of course; but there are poisons that cure. It might come into the Courts; and the nearer the proofs the happier he in withdrawing from his charge and effecting a reconciliation. Short of guilt, of course. Men are so strange. Imagine now, if a handsome young woman were known to be admired rather more than enough by a good-looking gentleman near about her own age. Oh, I 've no patience with the man for causing us to think and scheme! Only there are men who won't be set right unless we do. My husband used to say, change is such a capital thing in life's jog-trot, that men find it refreshing if we now and then reverse the order of our pillion-riding for them. A spiritless woman in a wife is what they bear least of all. Anything rather. Is Mr. Morsfield haunting Mrs. Lawrence Finchley's house as usual?'

Aminta's cheeks unrolled their deep damask rose at the abrupt intrusion of the name. 'I meet him there.'

'Lord Adderwood, Sir John Randeller, and the rest?'

'Two or three times a week.'

'And the lady, wife of the captain, really a Lady Fair—Mrs. . . . month of May: so I have to get at it.'

'She may be seen there.'

'Really a contrast, when you two are together! As to reputation, there is an exchange of colours. Those lawyers hold the keys of the great world, and a naughty world it is, I fear—with exceptions, who are the salt, but don't taste so much. I can't help enjoying the people at Mrs. Lawrence Finchley's. I like to feel I

can amuse them, as they do me. One puzzles for what they say—in somebody's absence, I mean. They must take Lord Ormont for a perfect sphinx; unless they are so silly as to think they may despise him, or suppose him indifferent. Oh, that upper class! It 's a garden, and we can't help pushing to enter it; and fair flowers, indeed, but serpents too, like the tropics. It tries us more than anything else in the world—well, just as good eating tries the constitution. He ought to know it and feel it, and give his wife all the protection of his name, instead of—not that he denies: I have brought him to that point; he cannot deny it with me. But not to present her—to shun the Court; not to introduce her to his family, to appear ashamed of her! My darling Aminta, a month of absence for reflection on your legally-wedded husband's conduct increases my astonishment. For usually men old enough to be the grandfathers of their wives——'

'Oh, pray, aunty, pray, pray!' Aminta cried, and her body writhed. 'No more to-night. You mean well, I am sure. Let us wait. I shall sleep, perhaps, if I go to bed early. I dare say I am spiritless—not worth more than I get. I gave him the lead altogether; he keeps it. In everything else he is kind; I have all the luxuries —enough to loathe them. Kiss me and say good-night.'

Aminta made it imperative by rising. Her aunt stood up, kissed, and exclaimed, 'I tell you you are a queenly creature, not to be treated as any puny trollop of a handmaid. And although he is a great nobleman, he is not to presume to behave any longer, my dear, as if your family had no claim on his consideration. My husband, Alfred Pagnell, would have laid that before him pretty quick. You are the child of the Farrells and the Solers, both old families; on your father's side you

are linked with the oldest nobility in Europe. It flushes one to think of it! Your grandmother, marrying Captain Algernon Farrell, was the legitimate daughter of a Grandee of Spain, as I have told Lord Ormont often, and I defy him to equal that for a romantic marriage in the annals of his house, or boast of bluer blood. Again, the Solers——'

'We take the Solers for granted, aunty, good night.'

'Commoners, if you like; but established since the Conquest. That is, we trace the pedigree. And to be treated, even by a great nobleman, as if we were stuff picked up out of the ditch! I declare, there are times when I sit and think and boil. Is it chivalrous, is it generous—is it, I say, decent—is it what Alfred would have called a fair fulfilment of a pact, for your wedded husband—? You may close my mouth! But he pretends to be chivalrous and generous, and he has won a queen any wealthy gentleman in England—I know of one, if not two—would be proud to have beside him in equal state; and what is he to her? He is an extinguisher. Or is it the very meanest miserliness, that he may keep you all to himself? There we are again! I say he is an unreadable sphinx.'

Aminta had rung the bell for her maid. Mrs. Pagnell could be counted on for drawing in her tongue when the domestics were near.

A languor past delivery in sighs was on the young woman's breast. She could have heard without a regret that the heart was to cease beating. Had it been downright misery she would have looked about her with less of her exanimate glassiness. The unhappy have a form of life: until they are worn out, they feel keenly. She felt nothing. The blow to her pride of station and womanhood struck on numbed sensations. She could complain that the blow was not heavier.

A letter lying in her jewel-box called her to read it, for the chance of some slight stir. The contents were known. The signature of Adolphus Morsfield had a new meaning for her eyes, and dashed her at her husband in a spasm of revolt and wrath against the man exposing her to these letters, which a motion of her hand could turn to blood, and abstention from any sign maintained in a Satanic whisper, saying, 'Here lies one way of solving the riddle.' It was her husband who drove her to look that way.

The look was transient, and the wrath: she could not burn. A small portion of contempt lodged in her mind to shadow husbands precipitating women on their armoury for a taste of vengeance. Women can always be revenged —so speedily, so completely: they have but to dip. Husbands driving wives to taste their power execrate the creature for her fall deep downward. They are forgetful of causes.

Does it matter? Aminta's languor asked. The letter had not won a reply. Thought of the briefest of replies was a mountain of effort, and she moaned at her nervelessness in body and mind. To reply, to reproach the man, to be flame—an image of herself under the form she desired—gave her a momentary false energy, wherein the daring of the man, whose life was at a toss for the writing of this letter, hung lighted. She had therewith a sharp vision of his features, repellent in correctness, Greek in lines, with close eyes, hollow temples, pressed lips—a face indicating the man who can fling himself on a die. She had heard tales of women and the man. Some had loved him, report said. Here were words to say that he loved her. They might, poor man, be true. Otherwise she had never been loved.

Memory had of late been paying visits to a droopy plant in the golden summer drought on a gorgeous

mid-sea island, and had taken her on board to refresh her with voyages, always bearing down full sail on a couple of blissful schools, abodes of bloom and briny vigour, sweet merriment, innocent longings, dreams the shyest, dreams the mightiest. At night before sleep, at morn before rising, often during day, and when vexed or when dispirited, she had issued her command for the voyage. Sheer refreshment followed, as is ever the case if our vessel carries no freight of hopes. There could be no hopes. It was forgotten that they had ever been seriously alive. But it carried an admiration. Now, an admiration may endure, and this one had been justified all round. The figure heroical, the splendid, active youth, hallowed Aminta's past. The past of a bitterly humiliated Aminta was a garden in the coming kiss of sunset, with that godlike figure of young manhood to hallow it. There he stayed, perpetually assuring her of his triumphs to come.

She could have no further voyages. Ridicule convulsed her home of refuge. For the young soldier-hero to be unhorsed by misfortune, was one thing; but the meanness of the ambition he had taken in exchange for the thirst of glory, accused his nature. He so certainly involved her in the burlesque of the transformation that she had to quench memory.

She was, therefore, having smothered a good part of herself, accountably languid—a condition alternating with fire in Aminta; and as Mr. Morsfield's letter supplied the absent element, her needy instinct pushed her to read his letter through. She had not yet done that with attention.

Whether a woman loves a man or not, he is her lover if he dare tell her he loves her, and is heard with attention. Aware that the sentences were poison, she summoned her constitutional antagonism to the mad step

proposed, so far nullifying the virus as to make her shrink from the madness. Even then her soul cried out to her husband, Who drives me to read? or rather, to brood upon what she read. The brooding ensued, was the thirst of her malady. The best antidote she could hit on was the writer's face. Yet it expressed him, his fire and his courage—gifts she respected in him, found wanting in herself. Read by Lord Ormont, this letter would mean a deadly thing.

Aminta did her lord the justice to feel sure of him, that with her name bearing the superscription, it might be left on her table, and would not have him to peruse it. If he manœuvred, it was never basely. Despite resentment, her deepest heart denied his being indifferent either to her honour or his own in relation to it. He would vindicate both at a stroke, for a sign. Nevertheless, he had been behaving cruelly. She charged on him the guilt of the small preludes, archeries, anglings, veilings, evasions, all done with the eyelids and the mute of the lips, or a skirmisher word or a fan's flourish, and which, intended to pique the husband rather than incite the lover, had led Mrs. Lawrence Finchley to murmur at her ear, in close assembly, without a distinct designation of Mr. Morsfield, 'Dangerous man to play little games with!' It had brought upon her this letter of declaration, proposal, entreaty.

This letter was the man's life in her hands, and safe, of course. But surely it was a proof that the man loved her?

Aminta was in her five-and-twentieth year; when the woman who is uncertain of the having been loved, and she reputed beautiful, desireable, is impelled by a sombre necessity to muse on a declaration, and nibble at an idea of a test. If 'a dangerous man to play little games with,' he could scarcely be dangerous to a woman having

no love for him at all. It meant merely that he would soon fall to writing letters like this, and he could not expect an answer to it. But her heart really thanked him, and wished the poor gentleman to take its dumb response as his reward, for being the one sole one who had loved her.

Aminta dwelt on 'the one sole one.' Lord Ormont's treatment had detached her from any belief in love on his part; and the schoolboy, now ambitious to become a schoolmaster, was behind the screen unlikely to be lifted again by a woman valuing her pride of youth, though he had—behold our deceptions!—the sympathetic face entirely absent from that of Mr. Adolphus Morsfield, whom the world would count quite as handsome—nay, it boasted him. He enjoyed the reputation of a killer of ladies. Women have odd tastes, Aminta thought, and examined the gentleman's handwriting. It pleased her better. She studied it till the conventional phrases took a fiery hue, and came at her with an invasive rush.

The letter was cast back into the box, locked up; there an end to it, or no interdiction of sleep.

Sleep was a triumph. Aminta's healthy frame rode her over petty agitations of a blood uninflamed, as lightly as she swam the troubled sea-waters her body gloried to cleave. She woke in the morning peaceful and mildly reflective, like one who walks across green meadows. Only by degrees, by glimpses, was she drawn to remember the trotting, cantering, galloping, leaping of an active heart during night. We cannot, man or woman, control the heart in sleep at night. There had been wild leapings. Night will lead an unsatisfied heart of a woman, by way of sleep, to scale black mountains, jump jagged chasms. Sleep is a horse that laughs at precipices and abysses. We bid women, moreover, be all heart. They

are to cultivate their hearts, pay much heed to their hearts. The vast realm of feeling is open to these appointed keepers of the sanctuary household, who may be withering virgins, may be childless matrons, may be unhusbanded wives. Wandering in the vast realm which they are exhorted to call their own, for the additional attractiveness it gives them, an unsatisfied heart of woman will somewhat audaciously cross the borderland a single step into the public road of the vast realm of thinking. Once there, and but a single step on the road, she is a rebel against man's law for her sex. Nor is it urgent on her that she should think defiantly in order to feel herself the rebel. She may think submissively, with a heart (the enlarged, the scientifically plumped, the pasture of epicurean man), with her coveted heart in revolt, and from the mere act of thinking at all.

Aminta reviewed perforce, dead against her will, certain of the near-to-happiness racings overnight. She thinned her lips, and her cheeks glowed. An arm, on the plea of rescuing, had been round her. The choice now offered her was, to yield to softness or to think. She took the latter step, the single step of an unaccustomed foot, which women educated simply to feel, will, upon extreme impulsion, take; and it held a candle in a windy darkness. She saw no Justice there. The sensational immensity touched sublime, short of that spirit of Justice required for the true sublime. And void of Justice, what a sunless place is any realm! Infants, the male and the female alike, first begin to know they feel when it is refused them. When they know they feel, they have begun to reflect. The void of Justice is a godless region. Women, to whom the solitary thought has come as a blown candle, illumining the fringes of their storm, ask themselves whether they

are God's creatures or man's. The question deals a sword-stroke of division between them and their human masters. Young women, animated by the passions their feeling bosoms of necessity breed, and under terror discover, do not distinguish an abstract justice from a concrete. They are of the tribe too long hereditarily enslaved to conceive an abstract. So it is with them, that their God is the God of the slave, as it is with all but the bravest of boys. He is a Thing to cry to, a Punisher, not much of a Supporter—the Biblical Hebrew's right reading of Nature, favouring man, yet prompt to confound him, and with woman for the instrument of vengeance. By such a maze the blindfolded are brought round to see Justice on earth. If women can only believe in some soul of justice, they will feel they belong to God—of the two; and the peril for them then is, that they will set the one incomprehensible Power in opposition to the other, urging their unsatisfied natures to make secret appeal away from man, and his laws altogether, at the cost of losing clear sight of the God who shines in thought. It is a manner whereby the desperately harried among these creatures of the petted heart arrive upon occasion at an agreeable, almost reposeful, contemplation of the reverse of God.

There is little pleasure to be on the lecture-rostrum for a narrator sensible to the pulses of his audience. Justice compels at times. In truth, there are times when the foggy obscurities of the preacher are by comparison broad daylight beside the whirling loose tissues of a woman unexplained. Aminta was one born to prize rectitude, to walk on the traced line uprightly; and while the dark rose overflowed the soft brown of her cheeks, under musings upon her unlicenced heart's doings overnight, she not only pleaded for woeful creatures of her sex burdened as she and erring, she

weighed them in the scales with men, and put her heart where Justice pointed, sending men to kick aloft.

Her husband, the man-riddle: she was unable to rede or read him. Her will could not turn him, nor her tongue combat; nor was it granted her to pique the mailed veteran. Every poor innocent little bit of an art had been exhausted. Her title was Lady Ormont: her condition actually slave. A luxuriously established slave, consorting with a singularly enfranchised set,—as, for instance, Mrs. Lawrence Finchley and Lord Adderwood; Sir John Randeller and Lady Staines; Mrs. May, Amy May, notorious wife of a fighting captain, the loveliest of blondes; and other ladies, other gentlemen, Mr. Morsfield in the list, paired or not yet paired: gossip raged. Aminta was of a disposition too generously cordial to let her be the rigorous critic of people with whom she was in touch. But her mind knew relief when she recollected that her humble little school-mate, Selina Collett, who had suffered on her behalf in old days, was coming up to her from the Suffolk coast on a visit for a week. However much a slave and an unloved woman, she could be a constant and protecting friend. Besides, Lord Ormont was gracious to little Selina. She thought of his remarks about the modest-minded girl after first seeing her. From that she struck upon a notion of reserves of humaneness being in him, if she might find the path to them: and thence, fortified by the repose her picture of little Selina's merit had bestowed, she sprang to the idea of valiancy, that she would woo him to listen to her, without inflicting a scene. He had been a listening lover, seeming lover, once, later than the Granada sunsets. The letter in her jewel-box urged Aminta to clear her conscience by some means, for leaving it unburnt.

CHAPTER VII

EXHIBITS EFFECTS OF A PRATTLER'S DOSES

THE rules in Lord Ormont's household assisted to shelter him for some hours of the day from the lady who was like a blast of sirocco under his roof. He had his breakfast alone, as Lady Charlotte had it at Olmer; a dislike of a common table in the morning was a family trait with both. At ten o'clock the secretary arrived, and they were shut up together. At the luncheon table Aminta usually presided. If my lord dined at home, he had by that time established an equanimity rendering his constant civility to Mrs. Pagnell less arduous. The presence of a woman of tongue, perpetually on the spring to gratify him and win him, was among the burdens he bore for his Aminta.

Mrs. Pagnell soon perceived that the secretary was in favour. My lord and this Mr. Weyburn had their pet themes of conversation, upon which the wary aunt of her niece did not gaze like the wintry sun with the distant smile her niece displayed over discussions concerning military biographies, Hannibal's use of his elephants and his Numidian horse, the Little St. Bernard, modern artillery, ancient slingers, English and Genoese bowmen, Napoleon's tactics, his command to the troopers to 'give point,' and English officers' neglect of sword exercise, and the 'devil of a day' Old England is to have on a day to come. My lord connected our day of trial with India. Mrs Pagnell assumed an air of studious interest; she struck in to give her niece a lead, that Lord Ormont might know his countess capable of joining

the driest of subjects occupying exalted minds. Aminta did not follow her; and she was extricated gallantly by the gentlemen in turn.

The secretary behaved with a pretty civility. Aminta shook herself to think tolerantly of him when he, after listening to the suggestion, put interrogatively, that we should profit by Hannibal's example and train elephants to serve as a special army corps for the perfect security of our priceless Indian Empire, instanced the danger likely to result from their panic fear of cannon, and forbore to consult Lord Ormont's eye.

Mrs Pagnell knew that she had put her foot into it; but women advised of being fools in what they say, are generally sustained by their sense of the excellent motive which impelled them. Even to the Countess of Ormont, she could have replied, 'We might have given them a higher idea of us'—if, that meant, the Countess of Ormont had entered the field beside her, to the exclusion of a shrinking Aminta. She hinted as much subsequently, and Aminta's consciousness of the truth was touched. The young schoolmaster's company sat on her spirits, deadened her vocabulary. Her aunt spoke of passing the library door and hearing the two gentlemen loudly laughing. It seemed subserviency on the fallen young hero's part. His tastes were low. He frequented the haunts of boxing men; her lord informed her of his having made, or of his making, matches to run or swim or walk certain distances against competitors or within a given time. He had also half a dozen boys or more in tow, whom he raced out of town on Sundays; a nucleus of the school he intended to form.

But will not Achilles become by comparison a common rushlight where was a blazing torch, if we see him clap a clown's cap on the head whose golden helm was fired by Pallas?

Nay, and let him look the hero still: all the more does he point finger on his meanness of nature.

Turning to another, it is another kind of shame that a woman feels, if she consents to an exchange of letters —shameful indeed, but not such a feeling of deadly sickness as comes with the humiliating view of an object of admiration degraded. Bad she may be; and she may be deceived, vilely treated, in either case. And what is a woman's pride but the staff and banner of her soul, beyond all gifts? He who wounds it cannot be forgiven—never!—he has killed the best of her. Aminta found herself sliding along into the sentiment, that the splendid idol of a girl's worship is, if she discover him in the lapse of years as an infinitesimally small one, responsible for the woman's possible reckless fit of giddiness. And she could see her nonsense; she could not correct it. Lines of the letters under signature of Adolphus were phosphorescent about her: they would recur; and she charged their doing so on the discovered meanness of the girl's idol. Her wicked memory was caused by his having plunged her low.

Mrs. Pagnell performed the offices of attention to Mr. Weyburn in lieu of the countess, who seemed to find it a task to sit at the luncheon table with him, when Lady Ormont was absent. 'Just peeped in,' she said as she entered the library, 'to see if all was comfortable'; and gossip ensued, not devoid of object. She extracted an astonishingly smooth description of Lady Charlotte. Weyburn was brightness in speaking of the much-misunderstood lady. 'She 's one of the *living* women of the world.'

'You are sure you don't mean one of the worldly women?' Mrs. Pagnell rejoined.

'She has to be known to be liked,' he owned.

'And you were, one hears, among the favoured?'

'I can scarcely pretend to that, ma'am.'

'You were recommended.'

'Lady Charlotte is devoted to her brother.'

Mrs. Pagnell's bosom heaved. 'How strange Lord Ormont is! One would suppose, with his indignation at the country for its treatment of him, admirers would be welcome. Oh dear, no! that is not the way. On board the packet, on our voyage to Spain, my niece in her cabin, imploring mercy of Neptune, as they say, I heard of Lord Ormont among the passengers. I could hardly credit my ears. For I had been hearing of him from my niece ever since her return from a select establishment for the education of young ladies, not much more than a morning's drive out of London, though Dover was my residence. She had got a hero! It was Lord Ormont! Lord Ormont! all day: and when the behaviour of the country to him became notorious, Aminta —my niece the countess—she could hardly contain herself. A secret:—I promised her—it 's not known to Lord Ormont himself:—a printed letter in a metropolitan paper, copied into the provincial papers, upholding him for one of the greatest of our patriot soldiers and the saviour of India, was the work of her hands. You would, I am sure, think it really well written. Meeting him on deck—the outline of the coast of Portugal for an introductory subject, our Peninsular battles and so forth —I spoke of her enthusiasm. The effect was, to cut off all communication between us. I had only to appear, Lord Ormont vanished. I said to myself, this is a character. However, the very mention of him to my niece, as one of the passengers on board—medicine, miraculous! She was up in half an hour, out pacing the deck before evening, hardly leaning on my arm, and the colour positively beginning to show on her cheeks again. He fled, of course. I had prepared her for his eccentricities.

Next morning she was out by herself. In the afternoon Lord Ormont strode up to us—his military step—and most courteously requested the honour of an introduction. I had broken the ice at last; from that moment he was cordiality itself, until—I will not say, until he had called her his own—a few little misunderstandings!—not with his countess. You see, a resident aunt is translated mother-in-law by husbands; though I spare them pretty frequently; I go to friends, they travel. Here in London she must have a *dueña*.—The marriage at Madrid, at the Embassy:—well, perhaps it was a step for us, for commoners, though we rank with the independent. Has her own little pin-money—an inheritance. Perhaps Lady Eglett gives the world her version. She may say, there was aiming at station. I reply, never was there a more whole-hearted love-match! Absolutely the girl's heart has been his from the period of her school-days. Oh! a little affair—she was persecuted by a boy at a neighbouring school. Her mistress wrote me word—a very determined Romeo young gentleman indeed—quite alarmed about him. In the bud! I carried her off on the spot, and snapped it effectually. Warned he meant to be desperate, I kept her away from my house at Dover four months, place to place; and I did well. I heard on my return, that a youth, answering to the schoolmistress's description of him, had been calling several times, the first two months and longer. You have me alluding to these little nonsensical nothings, because she seemed born to create violent attachments, even at that early day; and Lady Eglett—Lady Charlotte Eglett may hear; for there is no end to them, and impute them to her, when really!—can she be made responsible for eyes innocent of the mischief they appear destined to do? But I am disturbing you in your work.'

'You are very good, ma'am,' said the ghost of the determined young gentleman.

'A slight cold, have you?' Mrs. Pagnell asked solicitously.

'Dear me, no!' he gave answer with a cleared throat.

In charging him with more than he wanted to carry, she supplied him with particulars he had wanted to know; and now he asked himself what could be the gain of any amount of satisfied curiosity regarding a married Aminta. She slew my lord on board a packet-boat; she bears the arrows that slay. My lord married her where the first English chaplain was to be found; that is not wonderful either. British Embassy, Madrid! Weyburn believed the ceremony to have been performed there: at the same time, he could hear Lady Charlotte's voice repeating with her varied intonation Mrs. Pagnell's impressive utterances; and he could imagine how the somewhat silly duenna aunt, so penetrable in her transparent artifices, struck emphasis on the incredulity of people inclined to judge of the reported ceremony by Lord Ormont's behaviour to his captive.

How explain that strange matter? But can there be a gain in trying to sound it? Weyburn shuffled it away. Before the fit of passion seized him, he could turn his eager mind from anything which had not a perceptible point of gain, either for bodily strength or mental acquisition, or for money, too, now that the school was growing palpable as an infant in arms and agape for the breast. Thought of gain, and the bent to pursue it, is the shield of Athene over young men in the press of the seductions. He had to confess his having lost some bits of himself by reason of his meditations latterly; and that loss, if we let it continue a space, will show in cramp at the wrist, logs on the legs, a wheezy wind, for any fellow vowed to physical trials of strength and skill.

It will show likewise in the brain beating broken wings —inability to shoot a thought up out of the body for half a minute. And, good Lord! how quickly the tight-strung fellow crumbles, when once the fragmentary disintegration has begun! Weyburn cried out on a heart that bounded off at prodigal gallops, and had to be nipped with reminders of the place of good leader he was for taking among the young. Hang superexcellence! but we know those moanings over the troubles of a married woman; we know their sources, know their goal, or else we are the fiction-puppet or the Bedlamite; and she is a married woman, married at the British Embassy, Madrid, if you please! after a few weeks' acquaintance with her husband, who doubtless wrote his name intelligibly in the registrar's book, but does not prove himself much the hero when he drives a pen, even for so little as the signing of his name! He signed his name, apparently not more than partly pledging himself to the bond. Lord Ormont's autobiographical scraps combined with Lady Charlotte's hints and Mrs. Pagnell's communications, to provoke the secretary's literary contempt of his behaviour to his wife. However, the former might be mended, and he resumed the task.

It had the restorative effect of touching him to see his old hero in action; whereby he was brought about to a proper modesty, so that he really craved no more than for the mistress of this house to breathe the liberal air of a public acknowledgement of her rightful position. Things constituted by their buoyancy to float are remarkable for lively bobbings when they are cast upon the waters; and such was the case with Weyburn, until the agitation produced by Mrs. Pagnell left him free to sail away in the society of the steadiest.

He decided that by not observing, not thinking, not feeling, about the circumstances of the household into

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which Fate had thrown him, he would best be able—probably it was the one way—to keep himself together; and his resolution being honest all round, he succeeded in it as long as he abstained from a very wakeful vigilance over simple eyesight. For if one is nervously on guard to not-see, the matter starts up winged, and enters us, and kindles the mind, and tingles through the blood; it has us as a foe. The art of blind vision requires not only practice, but an intimate knowledge of the arts of the traitor we carry within. Safest for him, after all, was to lay fast hold of the particularly unimportant person he was, both there and anywhere else. The Countess of Ormont's manner toward him was to be read as a standing index of the course he should follow; and he thanked her. He could not quite so sincerely thank her aunt. His ingratitude for the sickly dose she had administered to him sprang a doubt whether Lady Ormont now thanked her aunt on account of services performed at the British Embassy, Madrid.

Certain looks of those eyes recently, when in colloquy with my lord, removed the towering nobleman to a shadowed landscape.

Was it solely an effect of eyes commanding light, and having every shaft of the quiver of the rays at her disposal? Or was it a shot from a powerful individuality issuing out of bondage to some physical oppressor no longer master of the soul, in peril of the slipping away of the body? Her look on him was not hate: it was larger, more terribly divine. Those eyes had elsewhere once looked love: they had planted their object in a throbbing Eden. The man on whom they had looked shivered over the thought of it after years of blank division.

Rather than have those eyes to look on him their displacing unintentness, the man on whom they had

once looked love would have chosen looks of wrath, the darts that kill—blest darts of the celestial Huntress, giving sweet sudden cessation of pain, in the one everlasting last flash of life with thought that the shot was hers. Oh for the *ἀγανὰ βέλεα* of the Merciful in splendour!

These were the outcries of the man deciding simultaneously not to observe, not to think, not to feel, and husbanding calculations upon storage of gain for the future. Softness held the song below. It came of the fact that his enforced resolution, for the sake of sanity, drove his whole reflective mind backward upon his younger days, when an Evening and a Morning star in him greeted the bright Goddess Browny or sang adieu, and adored beyond all golden beams the underworld whither she had sunk, where she was hidden.

Meanwhile, the worthy dame who had dosed him was out in her carriage, busy paying visits to distinguished ladies of the great world, with the best of excuses for an early call, which was gossip to impart, such as the Countess of Ormont had not yet thought of mentioning; and two or three of them were rather amusedly interested to hear that Lord Ormont had engaged a handsome young secretary, 'under the patronage of Lady Charlotte Eglett, devoted to sports of all kinds, immensely favoured by both.' Gossip must often have been likened to the winged insect bearing pollen to the flowers; it fertilizes many a vacuous reverie. Those flowers of the upper garden are not, indeed, stationary and in need of the missionary buzzer, but if they have been in one place unmoved for one hour, they are open to take animation from their visitors. Aminta was pleasantly surprised next day by the receipt of a note from Mrs. Lawrence Finchley's, begging to be invited to lunch if she came, as she had a purpose in the wish to meet my lord.

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. LAWRENCE FINCHLEY

My lord had one of his wilful likings for Isabella Lawrence Finchley, and he consented to the torture of an hour of Mrs. Nargett Pagnell in the middle of the day, just to taste the favourite he welcomed at home as he championed her abroad. The reasons were numerous and intimate why she pleased him. He liked the woman, enjoyed the cause for battle that she gave. Weyburn, on coming to the luncheon table, beheld a lady with the head of a comely boy, the manner, softened in delicate feminine, of a capital comrade. Her air of candour was her nature in her face; and it carried a guileless roguery, a placid daring, a supersensual naughtiness, a simplicity of repose amid the smoky reputation she created, that led one to think the vapour calumnious or the creature privileged. That young boy's look opened him at once; he had not to warm to her,—he flew. Ordinarily the sweetest ladies will make us pass through cold mist and cross a stile or two, or a broken bridge, before the formalities are cleared away to grant us rights of citizenship. She was like those frank lands where we have not to hand out a passport at the frontier and wait for dubious inspection of it.

She prevailed with cognizant men and with the frivolous. Women were capable of appreciating her, too; as Aminta did, despite some hinted qualifications addressed shyly to her husband. But these were the very matters exciting his particular esteem. He was of Lady Charlotte's mind, in her hot zeal against injustice done to the creatures she despised; and yet more than she

applauded a woman who took up her idiot husband's challenge to defend her good name, and cleared it, right or wrong, and beat him down on his knees, and then started for her spell of the merry canter over turf: an example to the English of the punishment they get for their stupid Puritanic tyranny—sure to be followed by a national helter-skelter down-hill headlong. And Mrs. Lawrence was not one of the corrupt, he argued; she concealed what it was decent to conceal, without pouting hypocritical pretences; she had merely dispensed with idle legal formalities, in the prettiest curvetting airy wanton way, to divorce the man who tried to divorce her, and 'whined to be forgiven when he found he couldn't. Adderwood was ready to marry her to-morrow, if the donkey husband would but go and bray his last. Half a dozen others were heads off on the same course to that goal.'

That was her champion's perusal of a lady candidly asserting her right to have breeched comrades, and paying for it in the advocacy which compromises. She was taken to be and she was used as a weapon wherewith to strike at our Pharisees. Women pushing out into the world for independence, bleed heavy payments all round.

The earl's double-edged defence of her was partly a vindication of another husband, who allowed his wife to call her friend; he was nevertheless assured of her not being corrupt, both by his personal knowledge of the lady, and his perception of her image in the bosom of his wife. She did no harm there, he knew well. Although he was not a man to put his trust in faces, as his young secretary inclined to do, Mrs. Lawrence's look of honest boy did count among the pleadings. And somewhat so might a government cruiser observe the intrusion of a white-sailed yacht in protected sea-waters, where licenced trawlers are at the haul.

Talk over the table coursed as fluently as might be, with Mrs. Pagnell for a boulder in the stream. Uninformed by malice, she led up to Lord Adderwood's name, and perhaps more designedly spoke of Mr. Morsfield, on whom her profound reading into the female heart of the class above her caused her to harp, as 'a real Antinous,' that the ladies might discuss him and Lord Ormont wax meditative.

Mrs. Lawrence pitied the patient gentleman, while asking him in her mind who was the author of the domestic burden he had to bear.

'It reminds me I have a mission,' she said. 'There 's a fencing match down at a hall in the West, near the barracks; private and select: Soldier and Civilian; I forget who challenged—Civilian, one judges; Soldiers are the peaceful party. They want you to act "umpire," as they call it, on the military side, my dear lord; and you will?—I have given my word you will bring Lady Ormont. You will?—and not let me be confounded! Yes, and we shall make a party. I see consent. Aminta will enjoy the switch of steel. I love to see fencing. It rouses all that is diabolical in me.'

She sent a skimming look at the secretary sitting opposite.

'And I,' said he, much freshened.

'You fence?'

'Handle the foils.'

'If you must speak modestly! Are you in practice?'

'I spend an hour in Captain Chiallo's fencing rooms generally every evening before dinner. I heard there the first outlines of the match proposed. You are right; it was the civilian.'

'Mr. Morsfield, as I suspected.'

She smiled to herself, like one saying, Not badly managed, Mr. Morsfield!

'Italian school?' Lord Ormont inquired, with a screw of the eyelids.

'French, my lord.'

'The only school for teaching.'

'The simplest—has the most rational method. Italians are apt to be tricky. But they were masters once, and now and then they send out a fencer the French can't touch.'

'How would you account for it?'

'If I had to account for it, I should say, hotter blood, cool nerve, quick brain.'

'Hum. Where are we, then?'

'We don't shine with the small sword.'

'We had men neatly pinked for their slashings in the Peninsula.'

'We 've had clever Irishmen.'

'Hot enough blood! This man Morsfield—have you crossed the foils with him?'

'Goes at it like a Spaniard; though Spaniards in Paris have been found wary enough.'

My lord hummed. 'Fellow looks as if he would easily lose his head over steel.'

'He can be dangerous.'

The word struck on something, and rang.

Mrs. Lawrence had a further murmur within her lips. Her travelling eye met Aminta's and passed it.

'But not dangerous, surely, if the breast is padded?' said Mrs. Pagnell.

'Oh no, oh no; not in that case!' Mrs. Lawrence ran out her voluble assent, and her eyelids blinked; her fair boy's face was mischief at school under shadow of the master.

She said to Weyburn: 'Are you one in the list—to give our military a lesson? They want it.'

His answer was unheard by Aminta. She gathered

from Mrs. Lawrence's pleased sparkle that he had been invited to stand in the list; and the strange, the absurd spectacle of a young schoolmaster taking the heroic attitude for attack and defence wrestled behind her eyes with a suddenly vivid first-of-May cricketing-field, a scene of snowballs flying, the vision of a strenuous lighted figure scaling to noble young manhood. Isabella Lawrence's look at him spirited the bright past out of the wretched long-brown-coat shroud of the present, prompting her to grieve that some woman's hand had not smoothed a small tuft of hair, disorderly on his head a little above the left parting, because Isabella Lawrence Finchley could have no recollection of how it used to toss feathery-wild at his games.

My lord hummed again. 'I suspect we 're going to get a drubbing. This fellow here has had his French *maitre d'armes*. Show me your hand, sir.'

Weyburn smiled, and extended his right hand, saying: 'The wrist wants exercise.'

'Ha! square thumb, flesh full at the nails' ends; you were a bowler at cricket.'

'Now examine the palms, my lord; I judge by the lines on the palms,' Mrs. Pagnell remarked.

He nodded to her and rose.

Coffee had not been served, she reminded him; it was coming in, so down he sat a yard from the table; outwardly equable, inwardly cursing coffee, though he refused to finish a meal without his cup.

'I think the palms do betray something,' said Mrs. Lawrence; and Aminta said: 'Everything betrays.'

'No, my dear,' Mrs. Pagnell corrected her; 'the extremities betray, and we cannot read the centre. Is it not so, my lord?'

'It may be as you say, ma'am.'

She was disappointed in her scheme to induce a general

examination of palms, and especially his sphinx lordship's.

Weyburn controlled the tongue she so frequently tickled to an elvish gavotte, but the humour on his face touched Mrs. Lawrence's to a subdued good-fellow roguishness, and he felt himself invited to chat with her on the walk for a reposeful ten minutes in Aminta's drawing-room.

Mrs. Pagnell, 'quite enjoying the company,' as she told her niece, was dismayed to hear her niece tell her of a milliner's appointment, positive for three o'clock; and she had written it in her head 'p.m., four o'clock,' and she had mislaid or destroyed the milliner's note; and she still had designs upon his lordship's palms, things to read and hint around her off the lines. She departed.

Lord Ormont became genial; and there was no one present who did not marvel that he should continue to decree a state of circumstances more or less necessitating the infliction he groaned under. He was too lofty to be questioned, even by his favourites. Mrs. Lawrence conjured the ghost of Lady Charlotte for an answer: this being Lord Adderwood's idea. Weyburn let his thoughts go on fermenting. Pride froze a beginning stir in the bosom of Aminta.

Her lord could captivate a reluctant woman's bosom when he was genial. He melted her and made her call up her bitterest pride to perform its recent office. That might have failed; but it had support in a second letter received from the man accounted both by Mrs. Lawrence and by Mr. Weyburn 'dangerous'; and the thought of who it was that had precipitated her to 'play little games' for the sole sake of rousing him through jealousy to a sense of righteous duty, armed her desperately against him. She could exult in having read the second

letter right through on receipt of it, and in remembering certain phrases; and notably in a reflection shot across her bewildered brain by one of the dangerous man's queer mad sentences: *Be as iron as you like, I will strike you to heat*; and her thought: *Is there assurance of safety in a perpetual defence*?—all while she smiled on her genial lord, and signified agreement, with a smiting of wonderment at her heart, when he alluded to a panic shout of the country for defence, and said: 'Much crying of that kind weakens the power to defend when the real attack comes.' Was it true?

'But say what you propose?' she asked.

Lord Ormont proposed vigilance and drill; a small degree of self-sacrifice on the part of the population, and a look-out head in the War Department. He proposed to have a nation of stout-braced men laughing at the foreign bully or bandit, instead of being a pack of whimpering women; whom he likened to the randomly protestant geese of our country roadside, heads out a yard in a gabble of defence while they go backing.

So thereupon Aminta's notion of a resemblance in the mutual thought subsided; she relapsed on the cushioning sentiment that she was a woman. And—only a woman! he might exclaim, if it pleased him; though he would never be able to say she was one of the whimpering. She, too, had the choice to indulge in scorn of the superior man stone blind to proceedings intimately affecting him —if he cared! One might doubt it.

Mrs. Lawrence listened to him with a mind more disengaged, and a flitting disapproval of Aminta's unsympathetic ear, or reluctance to stimulate the devout attention a bruised warrior should have in his tent. She did not press on him the post of umpire. He consented—at her request, he said—to visit the show; but

refused any official position that would, it was clearly enough implied, bring his name in any capacity whatever before the country which had unpardonably maltreated him.

Feminine wits will be set working, when a point has been gained; and as Mrs. Lawrence could now say she had persuaded Lord Ormont to gratify her specially, she warmed to fancy she read him, and that she might have managed the wounded and angry giant. Her minor intelligence, caracoling unhampered by harassing emotions, rebuked Aminta's for not perceiving that to win him round to whatever a woman may desire, she must be with him, outstrip him even, along the line he chooses for himself; abuse the country, rail at the Government, ridicule the title of English Army, proscribe the name of India in his hearing. Little stings of jealousy are small insect bites, and do not pique a wounded giant hardly sensible of irritation under his huge, and as we assume for our purpose, justifiable wrath. We have to speculate which way does the giant incline to go? and turn him according to the indication.

Mrs. Lawrence was driven by her critic mood to think Aminta relied—erroneously, after woman's old fashion—on the might of superb dark eyes after having been captured. It seemed to her worse than a beautiful woman's vanity, a childishness. But her boy's head held boy's brains; and Lord Ormont's praise of the splendid creature's nerve when she had to smell powder in Spain, and at bull-fights, and once at a wrecking of their carriage down a gully on the road over the Alpujarras, sent her away subdued, envious, happy to have kissed the cheek of the woman who could inspire it.

CHAPTER IX

A FLASH OF THE BRUISED WARRIOR

The winning of Lord Ormont's consent to look on at the little bout of arms was counted an achievement; for even in his own rarefied upper circle, where the fervid sentiments are not allowed to be seen plunging, he had his troop of enthusiasts; and they were anxious that he should make an appearance in public, to take what consolation a misunderstood and injured man could get from evidence of the grateful esteem entertained for him by a party of his countrymen, who might reasonably expect at the same time to set eyes, at rather close quarters, on the wonderful dark beauty, supposed a Spaniard, occasionally beheld riding beside him. If it is possible to connect a woman with the devoutest of their anticipations, the sons of leisure up there will do it. But, in truth, an English world was having cause to ransack the dust-heaps for neglected men of mettle. Our intermittent ague, known as dread of invasion, was over the land. Twice down the columns of panic newspaper correspondence Lord Ormont saw his name cited, with the effect on him that such signs of national repentance approaching lodged a crabbed sourness in his consulting-room, whether of head or breast.

He was assailed by a gusty appeal from Lady Charlotte, bidding him seize the moment to proclaim his views; while the secretary had a private missive from her, wherein, between insistency and supplication, she directed him to bring the subject before my lord every day, and be sure to write out a fair copy of the epistle previous to the transmission of it. 'Capua' was mentioned; she

brought in 'a siren,' too. Her brother was to be the soldier again—fling off silken bonds. The world might prate of his morality; now was the hour for showing his patriotism, casting aside his just anger, and backing his chief's opinion. 'A good chance to get their names together.' To her brother she declared that the columns of the leading journal were open to him—'in large type'; he was to take her word for it; he had only to 'dictate away,' quite at his ease, just as he talked at Olmer, and leave the bother of the scribe's business to his *aide*. 'Lose no time,' she concluded; 'the country wants your ideas; let us have *your plan*.'

The earl raised his shoulders, and kept his *aide* exclusively at the Memoirs. Weyburn, however, read out to him, with accentuation, foolish stuff in the recurrent correspondence of the daily sheets, and a complacent burgess article, meant to be a summary of the controversy and a recommendation to the country to bask in the sun of its wealth again.

'Ay, be the porker sow it 's getting liker and liker to every year!' Lord Ormont exclaimed, and sprang on his feet. 'Take a pen. Shut up that box. We 'll give 'em digestive biscuits for their weak stomachs. Invasion can't be done, they say! I tell the doddered asses Napoleon would have been over if Villeneuve had obeyed him to the letter. Villeneuve had a fit of paralysis, owing to the prestige of Nelson—that 's as it happened. And they swear at prestige, won't believe in it, because it 's not fat bacon. I tell them, after Napoleon's first battles, prestige did half his work for him. It saved him at Essling from a plunge into the Danube; it saved him at Moskowa; it would have marched him half over England at his first jump on our shingle beach. But that squelch of fat citizens should be told—to the devil with them! will they ever learn? short of a second

William!—there were eight-and-forty hours when the liberty of this country hung wavering in the balance with those Boulogne boats. Now look at Ulm and Austerlitz, Essling, Wagram; put the victors in those little affairs to front our awkward squads. The French could boast a regimental system, and chiefs who held them as the whist-player his hand of cards. Had we a better general than the Archduke Charles? or cavalry and artillery equal to the Hungarian? or drilled infantry numbering within eighty thousand of the Boulogne-Wimereux camps? We had nothing but the raw material of courage—pluck, and no science. Ask any boxing man what he thinks of the chances. The French might have sacrificed a fleet to land fifty thousand. Our fleet was our one chance. Any foreign General at the head of fifty thousand trained, picked troops would risk it, and cut an *entrechat* for joy of the chance. We should have fought and bled and been marched over—a field of Anglo-Saxon stubble! and Nelson riding the Channel, undisputed lord of the waters. Heigh! by the Lord, this country would have been like a man free to rub his skin with his hand and a mortal disease in his blood. Are you ready? How anticipate a hostile march on the capital, is our business.'

Striding up and down the library, Lord Ormont dropped his wrath to dictate the practical measures for defence—detesting the cat's-cry 'defence,' he said; but the foe would bring his old growlers, and we should have to season our handful of regulars and mob of levies, turn the mass into troops. With plenty of food, and blows daily, Englishmen soon get stomachs for the right way to play the game; bowl as well as bat; and the sooner they give up the idea of shamming sturdy on a stiff hind leg, the better for their chances. Only, it 's a beastly thing to see that for their favourite attitude,—

like some dog of a fellow weak in the fists, weaker in the midriff, at a fair, who cries, Come on, and prays his gods you won't. All for peace, the rascal boasts himself, and he beats his wife and kicks his curs at home. Is there any one to help him now, he vomits gold and honours on the man he yesterday treated as a felon. Ha!

Bull the bumpkin disposed of, my lord drew leisurely back from the foeman's landing-place, at the head of a body of serious Englishmen; teaching them to be manageable as chess-pieces, ready as bow-strings to let fly. Weyburn rejoiced to find himself transcribing crisp sentences, hard on the matter, without garnish of scorn. Kent, Sussex, Surrey, all the southern heights about London, round away to the south-western of the Hampshire heathland, were accurately mapped in the old warrior's brain. He knew his points of vantage by name; there were no references to gazetteer or atlas. A chain of forts and earthworks enables us to choose our ground, not for clinging to them, but for choice of time and place to give battle. If we have not been playing double-dyed traitor to ourselves, we have a preponderating field artillery; our yeomanry and volunteer horsemen are becoming a serviceable cavalry arm; our infantry prove that their heterogeneous composition can be welded to a handy mass, and can stand fire and return it, and not be beaten by an acknowledged defeat.

'That 's English! yes, that 's English! when they 're at it,' my lord sang out.

'To know how to take a licking, that wins in the end,' cried Weyburn; his former enthusiasm for the hero mounting, enlightened by a reminiscence of the precept he had hammered on the boys at Cuper's.

'They fall well. Yes, the English fall like men,' said my lord, pardoning and embracing the cuffed nation. 'Bodies knocked over, hearts upright. That 's example;

we breed Ironsides out of a sight like that. If it weren't for a cursed feeble Government scraping *congés* to the taxpayer—well, so many of our good fellows would not have to fall. That I say; for this thing is going to happen some day, mind you, sir! And I don't want to have puncheons and hogsheads of our English blood poured out merely to water the soil of a conquered country because English Governments are a craven lot, not daring risk of office by offending the taxpayer. But, on!'

Weyburn sent Lady Charlotte glowing words of the composition in progress.

They worked through a day, and a second day—talked of nothing else in the intervals. Explanatory answers were vouchsafed to Aminta's modest inquiries at lunch, as she pictured scenes of smoke, dust and blood from the overpowering plain masculine lines they drew, terrible in bluntness. The third morning Lord Ormont had map and book to verify distances and attempt a scale of heights, take names of estates, farms, parishes, commons, patches of woodland. Weyburn wrote his fair copy on folio paper, seven-and-thirty pages. He read it aloud to the author on the afternoon of the fourth day, with the satisfaction in his voice that he felt. My lord listened and nodded. The plan for the defence of England's heart was a good plan.

He signed to have the manuscript handed to him. A fortified London secure of the Thames for abundant supplies, well able to breathe within earthworks extending along the southern hills, was clearly shown to stand the loss of two big battles on the Sussex weald or more East to North-east, if fortune willed it.

He rose from his chair, paced some steps, with bent head, came back thoughtfully, lifted the manuscript sheets for another examination. Then he stooped to the fire, spreading the edges unevenly, so that they

caught flame. Weyburn spied at him. It was to all appearance the doing of a man who had intended it and brought it to the predetermined conclusion.

'About time for you to be off for your turn at Chiallo's,' our country's defender remarked, after tossing the last half-burnt lump under the grate and shovelling at it.

'I will go, my lord,' said Weyburn; and he was glad to go.

He went, calculated his term of service under Lord Ormont. He was young, not a philosopher. Waste of anything was abhorrent to a nature pointed at store of daily gain, if it were only the gain in a new or a freshened idea; and time lost, work lost, good counsel to the nation lost, represented horrid vacuity to him, and called up the counter demonstration of a dance down the halls of madness, for proof that we should, at least, have jolly motion of limbs there before Perdition struck the great gong. Ay, and we should be twirling with a fair form on the arm: woman and man; as it ought to be; twirling downward, true, but together. Such a companionship has a wisdom to raise it above the title of madness. Name it, heartily, pleasure; and in contempt of the moralist burgess, praise the dance of a woman and the man together high over a curmudgeonly humping solitariness, that won't forgive an injury, nurses rancour, smacks itself in the face, because it can't—to use the old schoolboy words—take a licking!

These were the huddled, drunken sensations and thoughts entertained by Weyburn, without his reflecting on the detachment from his old hero, of which they were the sign. He criticized impulsively, and fancied he did no more, and was not doing much; though, in fact, criticism is the end of worship; the Brutus blow at that Imperial but mortal bosom.

The person criticized was manifest. Who was the

woman he twirled with? She was unfeatured, undistinguished, one of the sex, or all the sex: the sex to be shunned as our deadly sapper of gain, unless we find the chosen one to super-terrestrialize it and us, and trebly outdo our gift of our whole self for her.

She was indistinguishable, absolutely unknown; yet she murmured, or seemed to murmur—for there was no sound—a complaint of Lord Ormont. And she, or some soundless mouth of woman, said he was a splendid military hero, a chivalrous man, a man of inflexible honour; but had no understanding of how to treat a woman, or belief in her having equal life with him on earth.

She was put aside rather petulantly, and she took her seat out of the whirl with submission. Thinking she certainly was not Browny, whom he would have known among a million, he tried to quit the hall, and he twirled afresh, necessarily not alone; it is the unpardonable offence both to the Graces and the Great Mother for man to valse alone. She twirled on his arm, uninvited; accepted, as in the course of nature; hugged, under dictate of the nature of the man steeled against her by the counting of gain, and going now at desperation's pace, by very means of those defensive locked steam-valves meant to preserve him from this madness,—for the words of the red-lipped mate, where there were no words, went through him like a music when the bow is over the viol, sweeping imagination, and they said her life was wasting.

Was not she a priceless manuscript cast to the flames? Her lord had been at some trouble to win her. Or his great fame and his shadowed fortunes had won her. He took her for his own, and he would not call her his own. He comported himself with absolute, with kindly deference to the lady whose more than vital spark he let the gossips puff at and blur. He praised her courage,

visibly admired her person, admitted her in private to be his equal, degraded her in public. Could anything account for the behaviour of so manly and noble a gentleman?—Rhetoric made the attempt, and Weyburn gave up the windy business.

Discovering that his fair partner of the wasting life was—he struggled to quench the revelation—Aminta, he stopped the dance. If there was no gain in whirling fancifully with one of the sex, a spin of a minute with her was downright bankruptcy.

He was young, full of blood; his heart led him away from the door Lord Ormont had exposed; at which a little patient unemotional watchfulness might have intimated to him something besides the simple source of the old hero's complex chapter of conduct. As it was, Weyburn did see the rancour of a raw wound in operation. But he moralized and disapproved; telling himself, truly enough, that so it would not have been with him; instead of sounding at my lord's character, and his condition of the unjustly neglected great soldier, for the purpose of asking how that raw wound would affect an injured veteran, who compressed, almost repressed, the roar of Achilles, though his military bright name was to him his Briseis.

CHAPTER X

A SHORT PASSAGE IN THE GAME PLAYED BY TWO

Politest of men in the domestic circle and everywhere among women, Lord Ormont was annoyed to find himself often gruffish behind the tie of his cravat. Indeed, the temper of our eminently serene will feel the strain of

a doldrum-dulness that is goaded to activity by a nettle. The forbearance he carried farther than most could do was tempted to kick, under pressure of Mrs. Nargett Pagnell. Without much blaming Aminta, on whose behalf he submitted to it, and whose resolution to fix in England had brought it to this crisis, he magnanimously proposed to the Fair Enemy he forced her to be, and liked to picture her as being, a month in Paris.

Aminta declined it for herself; after six or more years of travelling, she wished to settle, and know her country, she said: a repetition remark, wide of the point, and indicatory to the game of Pull she was again playing beneath her smooth visage, unaware that she had the wariest of partners at the game.

'But go you—do, I beg,' she entreated. 'It will give you new impressions; and I cannot bear to tie you down here.'

'How you can consent to be tied down here, is the wonder to me!' said he. 'When we travelled through the year, just visited England and were off again, we were driving on our own road. Vienna in April and May—what do you say? You like the reviews there, and the dances, concerts, Zigeuner bands, military Bohemian bands. Or Egypt to-morrow, if you like—though you can't be permitted to swim in the Nile, as you wanted. Come, Xarifa, speak it. I go to exile without you. Say you come.'

She smiled firmly. The name of her honeymoon days was not a cajolery to her.

His name had been that of the Christian Romancero Knight Durandarte, and she gave it to him, to be on the proper level with him, while she still declined.

'Well, but just a month in Paris! There 's nothing doing here. And we both like the French theatre.'

'London will soon be filling.'

'Well, but——' He stopped; for the filling of London did really concern her, in the game of Pull she was covertly playing with him. 'You seem to have caught the fever of this London; . . . no bands . . . no reviews . . . Low comedy acting.' He muttered his objections to London.

'The society of people speaking one's town tongue, add that,' she ventured to say.

'You know you are ten times more Spanish than English. Moorish, if you like.'

'The slave of the gallant Christian Knight, converted, baptized, and blissful. Oh, I know. But now we are settled in England, I have a wish to study English society.'

'Disappointing, I assure you;—dinners heavy, dancing boorish, intrigue a blind-man's-buff. We 've been over it all before!'

'We have.'

'Admired, I dare say. You won't be understood.'

'I like my countrymen.'

'The women have good looks—of the ungarnished kind. The men are louts.'

'They are brave.'

'You 're to see their fencing. You 'll own a little goes a long way.'

'I think it will amuse me.'

'So I thought when I gave the nod to Isabella your friend.'

'You like her?'

'You, too.'

'One fancies she would make an encouraging second in a duel.'

'I will remember . . . when I call you out.'

'Oh, my dear lord, you have dozens to choose from; leave me my one if we are to enter the lists.'

'We are, it seems; unless you consent to take the run to Paris. You are to say Tom or Rowsley.'

'The former, I can never feel at home in saying; Rowsley is Lady Charlotte's name for you.'

The name of Lady Charlotte was an invitation to the conflict between them. He passed it, and said: 'Durandarte runs a mile on the mouth, and the Coriolanus of their newspapers helps a stage-player to make lantern jaws. Neither of them comes well from the lips of my girl. After seven years she should have hit on a nickname, of none of the Christian suit. I am not "at home" either with "my lord." However, you send me off to Paris alone; and you 'll be alone and dull here in this London. Incomprehensible to me why!'

'We are both wondering?' said Aminta.

'You 're handsomer than when I met you first—by heaven you are!'

She flushed her dark brown-red late-sunset. 'Brunes are exceptional in England.'

'Thousands admiring you, of course! I know, my love, I have a jewel.'

She asked him: 'What are jewels for?' and he replied, 'To excite cupidity.'

'When they 're shut in a box?'

''Ware burglars! But this one is not shut up. She shuts herself up. And up go her shoulders! Decide to be out of it, and come to Paris for some life for a month. No? It 's positive? When do you expect your little school friend?'

'After Easter. Aunt will be away.'

'Your little friend likes the country. I 'll go to my house agents. If there 's a country house open on the upper Thames, you can have swimming, boating, botanizing . . .'

He saw her throat swallow. But as he was offering agreeable things he chose to not understand how he was to be compassionate.

'Steignton?' she said, and did her cause no good by saying it feebly.

His look of a bygone awake-in-sleep old look, drearily known to her, was like a strip of sunlight on a fortress wall. It signified, Is the poor soul pushing me back to that again?

She compelled herself to say: 'Your tenant there?'

'Matter of business . . . me and my tenant,' he remarked. 'The man pays punctually.'

'The lease has expired.'

'Not quite. You are misinformed.'

'At Easter.'

'Ah! Question of renewing.'

'You were fond of the place.'

'I was fond of the place? Thank Blazes, I 'm not what I was!' He paced about. 'There 's not a corner of the place that doesn't screw an eye at me, because I had a dream there. *La gloire!*'

The rest he muttered. 'These English!' was heard.

Aminta said: 'Am I never to see Steignton?'

Lord Ormont invoked the Powers. He could not really give answer to this female talk of the eternities.

'Beaten I can never be,' he said, with instinctive indulgence to the greater creature. 'But down there at Steignton, I should be haunted by a young donkey swearing himself the fellow I grew up out of. No doubt of that. I don't like him the better for it. Steignton grimaces at a cavalry officer fool enough at his own risks and penalties to help save India for the English. Maunderers! You can't tell—they don't know themselves—what they mean. Except that they 're ready to take anything you hand 'em, and then pipe to your

swinging. I served them well—and at my age, in full activity, they condemn me to sit and gape!'

He stopped his pacing and gazed on the glass of the window.

'Would you wish me not to be present at this fencing?' said Aminta.

'Dear me! by all means, go, my love,' he replied.

Any step his Fair Enemy won in the secret game of Pull between them, she was undisputedly to keep.

She suggested: 'It might lead to unpleasantness.'

'Of what sort?'

'You ask?'

He emphasized: 'Have you forgotten? Something happened after that last ball at Challis's Rooms. Their women as well as their men must be careful not to cross me.'

Aminta had confused notions of her being planted in hostile territory, and torn and knitted, trumpeted to the world as mended, but not honourably mended in a way to stop corridor scandal. The ball at Challis's Rooms had been one of her steps won: it had necessitated a requirement for the lion in her lord to exhibit himself, and she had gained nothing with Society by the step, owing to her poor performance of the lion's mate. She had, in other words, shunned the countenance of some scattered people pityingly ready to support her against the deadly passive party known to be Lady Charlotte's.

She let her lord go; thinking that once more had she striven and gained nothing: which was true of all their direct engagements. And she had failed because of her being only a woman! Mr. Morsfield was foolishly wrong in declaring that she, as a woman, had reserves of strength. He was perhaps of Lady Charlotte's mind with regard to the existence of a Countess of Ormont, or he would know her to be incredibly cowardly. Cowardly under

the boast of pride, too; well, then, say, if you like, a woman!

Yet this mere shallow woman would not hesitate to meet the terrible Lady Charlotte at any instant, on any terms: and what are we to think of a soldier, hero, lion, dreading to tell her to her face that the persecuted woman is his wife!

'Am I a woman they can be ashamed of?' she asked, and did not seek the answer at her mirror. She was in her bedroom, and she put out a hand to her jewel-box, fingered it, found it locked, and abandoned her idle project. A gentleman was 'dangerous.' She had not found him so. He had the reputation, perhaps, because he was earnest. Not so very many men are earnest. She called to recollection how ludicrously practical he was in the thick of his passion. His third letter (addressed to the Countess of Ormont—whom he manifestly did not or would not take to be the veritable Countess—and there was much to plead for his error), or was it his fourth?—the letters were a tropical hail-storm:—third or fourth, he broke off a streaked thunderpeal, to capitulate his worldly possessions, give the names and degrees of kinship of his relatives, the exact amount of the rent-roll of his Yorkshire estates, of his funded property.

Silly man! but not contemptible. He proposed everything in honour, from his view of it.

Whether in his third, fourth, or fifth letter. . . . How many had come? She drew the key from her purse, and opened a drawer. The key of the jewel-box was applied to the lock.

Mr. Morsfield had sent her six flaming letters. He not only took no precautions, he boasted that he hailed the consequences of discovery. Six!

She lifted a pen: it had to be done.

He was briefly informed that he disturbed her peace. She begged he would abstain from any further writing to her.

The severity was in the brevity. The contrast of her style and his appeared harsh. But it belonged to the position.

Having with one dash of the pen scribbled her three lines, she slipped the letter into her pocket. That was done, and it had to be done; it ought to have been done before. How simple it was when one contemplated it as actually done! Aminta made the motion of a hand along the paper, just a flourish. Soon after, her head dropped back on the chair, and her eyes shut; she took in breath through parted lips. The brief lines of writing had cut away a lump of her vitality.

CHAPTER XI

THE SECRETARY TAKEN AS AN ANTIDOTE

Dusty wayfarers along a white high-road who know of a bubbling little spring across a stile, on the woodland borders of deep grass, are hailed to sit aside it awhile; and Aminta's feverishness was cooled by now and then a quiet conversation with the secretary ambitious to become a school-master. Lady Charlotte liked him, so did her lord; Mrs. Lawrence had chatted with him freshly, as it was refreshing to recollect; nobody thought him a stunted growth.

In Aminta's realized recollections, amid the existing troubles of her mind, the charge against him grew paler, and she could no longer quite think that the young hero transformed into a Mr. Cuper had deceived her, though

he had done it—much as if she had assisted at the planting and watched aforetime the promise of a noble tree, to find it, after an interval of years, pollarded—a short trunk shooting out a shock of small, slim, stiff branches; dwarfed and disgraced; serviceable perhaps; not ludicrous or ugly, certainly, taking it for a pollard. And he was a cool well-spring to talk with. He, supposed once to be a passionate nature, scorned passion as a madness; he smiled in his merciful executioner's way at the high society, of which her aim was to pass for one among the butterflies or dragonflies; he had lost his patriotism; he labelled our English classes *the skimmers, the gorgers, the grubbers,* and stigmatized them with a friendly air; and uttered words of tolerance only for farmers and surgeons and schoolmasters. But that was quite incidental in the humorous run of his talk, diverting to hear while it lasted. He had, of course, a right to his ideas.

No longer concerned in contesting them, she drank at the water of this plain earth-well, and hoped she preferred it to fiery draughts, though it was flattish, or, say, flavourless. In the other there was excess of flavour —or, no, spice it had to be called. The young schoolmaster's world seemed a sunless place, the world of traders bargaining for gain, without a glimmer of the rich generosity to venture life, give it, dare all for native land—or for the one beloved. Love pressed its claim on heroical generosity, and instantly it suffused her, as an earth under flush of sky. The one beloved! She had not known love; she was in her five-and-twentieth year, and love was not only unknown to her, it was shut away from her by the lock of a key that opened on no estimable worldly advantage in exchange, but opened on a dreary, clouded round, such as she had used to fancy it must be to the beautiful creamy circus-horse of the tossing

mane and flowing tail and superb step. She was admired; she was just as much doomed to a round of paces, denied the glorious fling afield, her nature's food. Hitherto she would have been shamefaced as a boy in forming the word 'love': now, believing it denied to her for good and all—for ever and ever—her bosom held and uttered the word. She saw the word, the nothing but the word that it was, and she envisaged it, for the purpose of saying adieu to it—good-bye even to the poor empty word.

This condition was attributable to a gentleman's wild rageing with the word, into which he had not infused the mystic spirit. He poured hot wine and spiced. If not the spirit of love, it was really the passion of the man. Her tremors now and again in the reading of his later letters humiliated her, in the knowledge that they came of no response to him, but from the temporary base acquiescence; which is, with women, a terrible perception of the gulf of their unsatisfied nature.

The secretary, cheerful at his work, was found for just the opening of a door. Sometimes she hesitated—to disturb him, she said to herself,—and went up-stairs or out visiting. He protested that he could work on and talk too. She was able to amuse her lord with some of his ideas. He had a stock of them, all his own.

Ideas, new-born and naked original ideas, are acceptable at no time to the humanity they visit to help uplift it from the state of beast. In the England of that period original or unknown ideas were a smoking brimstone to the nose, dread Arabian afrites, invisible in the air, jumping out of vases, armed for the slaughter of the venerable and the cherished, the ivy-clad and celestially haloed. They carried the dishevelled Mænad's torch. A step with them, and we were on the Phlegethon waters of the French Revolution. For a publication of simple

ideas men were seized, tried at law, mulcted, imprisoned, and not pardoned after the term of punishment; their names were branded; the horned elect butted at them; he who alluded to them offered them up, wittingly or not, to be damned in the nose of the public for an execrable brimstone stench.

Lord Ormont broke through his shouts or grunts at Aminta's report of the secretary's *ideas* on various topics, particularly the proposal that the lords of the land should head the land in a revolutionary effort to make law of his crazy, top-heavy notions, with a self-satisfied ejaculation: 'He has not favoured *me* with any of these puffballs of his.'

The deduction was, that the author sagaciously considered them adapted for the ear of a woman; they were womanish—*i.e.* flighty, gossamer. To the host of males, all ideas are female until they are made facts.

This idea, proposing it to our aristocracy to take up his other ideas, or reject them on pain of the forfeiture of their caste and headship with the generations to follow, and a total displacing of them in history by certain notorious, frowzy, scrubby pamphleteers and publishers, Lord Ormont thought amazingly comical. English nobles heading the weavers, cobblers, and barbers of England! He laughed, but he said, 'Charlotte would listen to that.'

The dread, high-sitting Lady Charlotte was, in his lofty thinking, a woman, and would therefore listen to nonsense, if it happened to strike a particular set of bells hanging in her cranium. She patronized blasphemous and traitorous law-breakers, just to keep up the pluck of the people, not with a notion of maintaining our English aristocracy eminent in history.

Lady Charlotte, however, would be the foremost to swoop down on the secretary's ideas about the education of women.

On that subject, Aminta said she did not know what to think.

Now, if a man states the matter he thinks, and a woman does but listen, whether inclining to agree or not, a perceptible stamp is left on soft wax. Lord Ormont told her so, with cavalier kindness.

She confessed 'she did not know what to think,' when the secretary proposed the education and collocation of boys and girls in one group, never separated, declaring it the only way for them to learn to know and to respect one another. They were to learn together, play together, have matches together, as a scheme for stopping the mischief between them.

'But, my dear girl, don't you see, the devilry was intended by Nature. Life would be the coldest of dishes without it.' And as for mixing the breeched and petticoated in those young days—'I can't enter into it,' my lord considerately said. 'All I can tell you is, I know boys.'

Aminta persisted in looking thoughtful.

'Things are bad, as they are now,' she said.

'Always were—always will be. They were intended to be, if we are to call them bad. Botched mendings will only make them worse.'

'Which side suffers?'

'Both; and both like it. One side must be beaten at any game. It 's off and on, pretty equal—except in the sets where one side wears thick boots. Is this fellow for starting a mixed sexes school? Funny mothers!'

'I suppose——' Aminta said, and checked the supposition. 'The mothers would not leave their girls unless they were confident . . .?'

'There 's to be a female head of the female department? He reckons on finding a woman as big a fool as himself? A fair bit of reckoning enough. He 's clever at the pen.

He doesn't bother me with his ideas; now and then I 've caught a sound of his bee buzzing.'

The secretary was left undisturbed at his labours for several days.

He would have been gladdened by a brighter look of her eyes at her next coming. They were introspective and beamless. She had an odd leaning to the talk upon Cuper's boys. He was puzzled by what he might have classed, in any other woman, as a want of delicacy, when she recurred to incidents which were red patches of the school time, and had clearly lost their glow for her.

A letter once written by him, in his early days at Cuper's, addressed to J. Masner, containing a provocation to fight with any weapons, and signed, 'Your Antagonist,' had been read out to the whole school, under strong denunciation of the immorality, the unchristian-like conduct of the writer, by Mr. Cuper; creating a sensation that had travelled to Miss Vincent's establishment, where some of the naughtiest of the girls had taken part with the audacious challenger, dreadful though the contemplation of a possible duel so close to them was. And then the girls heard that the anonymous 'Your Antagonist,' on being cited to proclaim himself in public assembly of school-mates and masters, had jumped on his legs and into the name of—one who was previously thought by Miss Vincent's good girls incapable of the 'appalling wickedness,' as Mr. Cuper called it, of signing 'Your Antagonist' to a Christian school-fellow, having the design to provoke a breach of the law of the land and shed Christian blood. Mr. Cuper delivered an impressive sermon from his desk to the standing-up boarders and day-scholars alike, vilifying the infidel Greek word 'antagonist.'

'Do you remember the offender's name?' the Countess of Ormont said; and Weyburn said—

'Oh yes, I 've not forgotten the incident.'

Her eyes, wherein the dead time hung just above the underlids, lingered, as with the wish for him to name the name.

She said: 'I am curious to hear how you would treat a case of that sort. Would you preach to the boys?'

'Ten words at most. The right assumption is, that both fellows were to blame. I fancy the proper way would be to appeal to the naughty girls for their opinion as to how the dispute should be decided.'

'You impose too much on them. And you are not speaking seriously.'

'Pardon me, I am. I should throw myself into the mind of a naughty girl—supposing none of them at hand—and I should let it be known that my eyes were shut to proceedings, always provided the weapons were not such as would cause a shock of alarm in female bosoms.'

'You would at your school allow it to be fought out?'

'Judging by the characters of the boys. If they had heads to understand, I would try them at their heads. Otherwise they are the better, they come round quicker to good blood, at their age—I speak of English boys—for a little hostile exercise of their fists. Well, for one thing, it teaches them the value of sparring.'

'I must imagine I am not one of the naughty sisterhood; for I cannot think I should ever give consent to fighting of any description, unless for the very best of reasons,' said the countess.

His eyes were at the trick of the quarter-minute's poising. Her lids fluttered. 'Oh, I don't mean to say I was one of the good,' she added.

At the same time her enlivened memory made her

conscious of a warning, that she might, as any woman might, so talk on of past days as to take rather more than was required of the antidote she had come for.

The antidote was excellent; cooling, fortifying; 'quite a chalybeate,' her aunt would say, and she was thankful. Her heart rose on a quiet wave of the thanks, and pitched down to a depth of uncounted fathoms. Aminta was unable to tell herself why.

Mrs. Lawrence Finchley had been announced. On her way to the drawing-room Aminta's brain fell upon a series of dots, that wound along a track to the point where she accused herself of a repented coquettry—cause of the burning letters she was doomed to receive and could not stop without rousing her lion. She dotted backwards; there was no sign that she had been guilty of any weakness other than the almost—at least, in design—innocent first move, which had failed to touch Lord Ormont in the smallest degree. Never failure more absolute!

She was about to inquire of her bosom's oracle whether she greatly cared now. For an answer, her brain went dotting along from Mr. Cuper's school, and a boy named Abner there, and a boy named Matey Weyburn, who protected the little Jew-boy, up to Mr. Abner in London, who recommended him in due season to various acquaintances; among them to Lady Charlotte Eglett. Hence the introduction to Lord Ormont. How little extraordinary circumstances are, if only we trace them to the source!

But if only it had appeared marvellous, the throbbing woman might have seized on it, as a thing fateful, an intervention distinctly designed to waken the best in her, which was, after all, the strongest. Yea, she could hope and pray and believe it was the strongest.

She was listening to Isabella Lawrence Finchley,

wishing she might have followed to some end the above line of her meditations.

Mrs. Lawrence was changed, much warmer, pressing to be more than merely friendly. Aminta twice gave her cheek for kisses. The secretary had spoken of Mrs. Lawrence as having the look of a handsome boy; and Aminta's view of her now underwent a change likewise. Compunction, together with a sisterly taste for the boyish fair one flying her sail independently, and gallantly braving the winds, induced her to kiss in return.

'You do like me a morsel?' said Mrs. Lawrence. 'I fell in love with you the last time I was here. I came to see Mr. Secretary—it 's avowed; and I have been thinking of you ever since, of no one else. Oh yes, for a man; but you caught me. I 've been hearing of him from Captain May. They fence at those rooms. And it 's funny, Mr. Morsfield practises there, you know; and there was a time when the lovely innocent Amy, Queen of Blondes, held the seat of the Queen of Brunes. Ah, my dear, the infidelity of men doesn't count. They are affected by the changeing moons. As long as the captain is civil to him, we may be sure beautiful Amy has not complained. Her husband is the pistol she carries in her pocket, and she has fired him twice, with effect. Through love of you I have learnt the different opinion the world of the good has of her and of me; I thought we ran under a common brand. There are gradations. I went to throw myself at the feet of my great-aunt, good old great-aunt Lady de Culme, who is a power in the land. I let her suppose I came for myself, and she reproached me with Lord Adder. I confessed to him and ten others. She is a dear, she 's ticklish, and at eighty-four she laughed! She looked into my eyes and saw a field with never a man in it—just the shadow of a man. She admitted the ten cancelled the one, and exactly

named to me, by comparison with the erring Amy, the sinner I am and must be, if I 'm to live. So, dear, the end of it is,' and Mrs. Lawrence put her fingers to a silken amber bow at Aminta's throat, and squared it and flattened it with dainty precision, speaking on under dropped eyelids, intent upon her work, 'Lady de Culme will be happy to welcome you whenever it shall suit the Countess of Ormont to accompany her disreputable friend. But what can I do, dear?' She raised her lids and looked beseechingly. 'I was born with this taste for the ways and games and style of men. I hope I don't get on badly with women; but if I 'm not allowed to indulge my natural taste, I kick the stable-boards and bite the manger.'

Aminta threw her arms round her, and they laughed their mutual peal.

Caressing her still, Aminta said: 'I don't know whether I embrace a boy.'

'That idea comes from a man!' said Mrs. Lawrence.

It was admitted. The secretary was discussed.

Mrs. Lawrence remarked: 'Yes, I like talking with him; he 's bright. You drove him out of me the day I saw him. Doesn't he give you the idea of a man who insists on capturing you and lets it be seen he doesn't care two snaps of a finger?'

Aminta petitioned on his behalf indifferently: 'He 's well bred.'

She was inattentive to Mrs. Lawrence's answer. The allusion of the Queen of Blondes had stung her in the unacknowledged regions where women discard themselves and are most sensitive.

'Decide on coming soon to Lady de Culme,' said Mrs. Lawrence. 'Now that her arms are open to you, she would like to have you in them. She is old——. You won't be rigorous? no standing on small punctilios?

She would call, but she does not—h'm, it is M. le Comte that she does not choose to—h'm. But her arms are open to the countess. It ought to be a grand step. You may be assured that Lady Charlotte Eglett would not be taken into them. My great-aunt has a great-aunt's memory. The Ormonts are the only explanation—if it 's an apology—she can offer for the behaviour of the husband of the Countess of Ormont. You know I like him. I can't help liking a man who likes me. Is that the way with a boy, Mr. Secretary? I must have another talk with the gentleman, my dear. You are Aminta to me.'

'Always Aminta to you,' was the reply, tenderly given.

'But as for comprehending him, I 'm as far off that as Lady de Culme, who hasn't the liking for him I have.'

'The earl?' said Aminta, showing by her look that she was in the same position.

Mrs. Lawrence shrugged: 'I believe men and women marry in order that they should never be able to understand one another. The riddle's best read at a moderate distance. It 's what they call the golden mean; too close, too far, we 're strangers. I begin to understand that husband of mine, now we 're on bowing terms. Now, I must meet the earl to-morrow. You will arrange? His hand wants forcing. Upon my word, I don't believe it 's more.'

Mrs. Lawrence contrasted him in her mind with the husband she knew, and was invigorated by the thought that a placable impenetrable giant may often be more pliable in a woman's hands than an irascible dwarf—until, perchance, the latter has been soundly cuffed, and then he is docile to trot like a squire, as near your heels as he can get. She rejoiced to be working for the woman she had fallen in love with.

Aminta promised herself to show the friend a livelier affection at their next meeting.

A seventh letter, signed 'Adolphus,' came by post, was read and locked up in her jewel-box. They were all nigh destruction for a wavering minute or so. They were placed where they lay because the first of them had been laid there, the box being a strong one, under a patent key, and discovery would mean the terrible. They had not been destroyed because they had, or seemed to her to have, the language of passion. She could read them unmoved, and appease a wicked craving she owned to having, and reproached herself with having, for that language.

Was she not colour in the sight of men? Here was one, a mouthpiece of numbers, who vowed that homage was her due, and devotion, the pouring forth of the soul to her. What was the reproach if she read the stuff unmoved?

But peruse and reperuse it, and ask impressions to tell our deepest instinct of truthfulness whether language of this character can have been written to two women by one hand! Men are cunning. Can they catch a tone? Not that tone!

She, too, Mrs. Amy May, was colour in the sight of men. Yet it seemed that he could not have written so to the Queen of Blondes. And she, by repute, was as dangerous to slight as he to attract. Her indifference exonerated him. Besides, a Queen of Blondes would not draw the hearts out of men in England, as in Italy and in Spain. Aminta had got thus far when she found 'Queen of Brunes' expunged by a mist: she imagined hearing the secretary's laugh. She thought he was right to laugh at her. She retorted simply: 'These are feelings that are poetry.'

A man may know nothing about them, and be an excellent schoolmaster.

Suggestions touching the prudence of taking Mrs.

Lawrence into her confidence, as regarded these troublesome letters of the man with the dart in his breast, were shuffled aside for various reasons: her modesty shrank; and a sense of honour toward the man forbade it. She would have found it easier to do if she had conspired against her heart in doing it. And yet, coldbloodedly to expose him and pluck the clothing from a passion—dear to think of only when it is profoundly secret—struck her as an extreme baseness, of which not even the woman who perused and reperused his letters could be guilty.

Her head rang with some of the lines, and she accused her head of the crime of childishness, seeing that her heart was not an accomplice. At the same time, her heart cried out violently against the business of a visit to Lady de Culme, and all the steps it involved. Justly she accused her heart of treason. Heart and head were severed. This, as she partly apprehended, is the state of the woman who is already on the slope of her nature's mine-shaft, dreading the rush downwards, powerless to break away from the light.

Letters perused and reperused, coming from a man never fervently noticed in person, conjure features one would wish to put beside the actual, to make sure that the fiery lines he writes are not practising a beguilement. Aminta had lost grasp of the semblance of the impassioned man. She just remembered enough of his eyes to think there might be healing in a sight of him.

Latterly she had refused to be exhibited to a tattling world as the great nobleman's conquest:—The *Beautiful Lady Doubtful* of a report that had scorched her ears. Theatres, rides, pleasure-drives, even such houses as she saw standing open to her had been shunned. Now she asked the earl to ride in the park.

He complied, and sent to the stables immediately, just

noted another of her veerings. The whimsy creatures we are matched to contrast with, shift as the very winds or feather-grasses in the wind. Possibly a fine day did it. Possibly, too, her not being requested to do it.

He was proud of her bearing on horseback. She rode well and looked well. A finer weapon wherewith to strike at a churlish world was never given into the hands of man. These English may see in her, if they like, that they and their laws and customs are defied. It does her no hurt, and it hits them a ringing buffet.

Among the cavaliers they passed was Mr. Morsfield. He rode by slowly. The earl stiffened his back in returning the salute. Both that and the gentleman were observed by Aminta.

'He sees to having good blood under him,' said the earl.

'I admired his mount,' she replied.

Interpreted by the fire of his writing, his features expressed character: insomuch that a woman could say of another woman, that she admired him and might reasonably do so. His gaze at her in the presence of her lord was audacious.

He had the defect of his virtue of courage. Yet a man indisputably possessing courage cannot but have an interesting face—though one may continue saying, Pity that the eyes are not a little wider apart! He dresses tastefully; the best English style. A portrait by a master hand might hand him down to generations as an ancestor to be proud of. But with passion and with courage, and a bent for snatching at the lion's own, does he not look foredoomed to an early close? Her imagination called up a portrait of Elizabeth's Earl of Essex to set beside him; and without thinking that the two were fraternally alike, she sent him riding away with the face of the Earl of Essex and the shadow of the unhappy nobleman's grievous fortunes over his head.

But it is inexcuseable to let the mind be occupied recurrently by a man who has not moved the feelings, wicked though it be to have the feelings moved by him. Aminta rebuked her silly wits, and proceeded to speculate from an altitude, seeing the man's projects in a singularly definite minuteness, as if the crisis he invoked, the perils he braved, the mute participation he implored of her for the short space until their fate should be decided, were a story sharply cut on metal. Several times she surprised herself in an interesting pursuit of the story; abominably cold, abominably interested. She fell upon a review of small duties of the day, to get relief; and among them a device for spiriting away her aunt from the table where Mrs. Lawrence wished to meet Lord Ormont. It sprang up to her call like an imp of the burning pit. She saw it ingenious and of natural aspect. I must be a born intriguer! she said in her breast. That was hateful; but it seemed worse when she thought of a woman commanding the faculty and consenting to be duped and foiled. That might be termed despicable; but what if she had not any longer the wish to gain her way with her lord?

Those letters are acting like a kind of poison in me! her heart cried: and it was only her head that dwelt on the antidote.

CHAPTER XII

MORE OF CUPER'S BOYS

Entering the dining-room at the appointed minute in a punctual household, Mrs. Lawrence informed the company that she had seen a Horse Guards orderly at the trot up the street. Weyburn said he was directing a

boy to ring the bell of the house for him. Lord Ormont went to the window.

'Amends and honours?' Mrs. Lawrence hummed: and added an operatic flourish of an arm. Something like it might really be imagined. A large square missive was handed to the footman. Thereupon the orderly trotted off.

My lord took seat at table, telling the footman to lay 'that parcel' beside the clock on the mantelpiece. Aminta and Mrs. Lawrence gave out a little cry of bird or mouse, pitiable to hear: they could not wait, they must know, they pished at sight of plates. His look deferred to their good pleasure, like the dead hand of a clock under key; and Weyburn placed the missive before him, seeing by the superscription that it was not official.

It was addressed, in the Roman hand of a boy's copy-book writing, to

General the Earl of Ormont, K.C.B., etc.,
Horse Guards,
London.'

The earl's eyebrows creased up over the address; they came down low on the contents.

He resumed his daily countenance. 'Nothing of importance,' he said to the ladies.

Mrs. Lawrence knocked the table with her knuckles.

Aminta put out a hand, in sign of her wish.

'Pray let me see it.'

'After lunch will do.'

'No, no, no! We are women—we are women,' cried Mrs. Lawrence.

'How can it concern women?'

'As well ask how a battle-field concerns them!'

'Yes, the shots hit us behind you,' said Aminta; and she, too, struck the table.

He did not prolong their torture. Weyburn received the folio sheet and passed it on. Aminta read. Mrs. Lawrence jumped from her chair and ran to the countess's shoulder; her red lips formed the petitioning word to the earl for the liberty she was bent to take.

'Peep? if you like,' my lord said, jesting at the blank she would find, and soft to the pretty play of her mouth.

When the ladies had run to the end of it, he asked them: 'Well; now then?'

'But it 's capital—the dear laddies!' Mrs. Lawrence exclaimed.

Aminta's eyes met Weyburn's.

She handed him the sheet of paper; upon the transmission of which empty thing from the Horse Guards my lord commented: 'An orderly!'

Weyburn scanned it rapidly, for the table had been served.

The contents were these:—

'HIGH BRENT NEAR ATTSWELL.

'*April 7th.*

'*To* GENERAL THE EARL OF ORMONT

'*Cavalry.*

'May it please your Lordship, we, the boys of Mr. Cuper's school, are desirous to bring to the notice of the bravest officer England possesses now living, a Deed of Heroism by a little boy and girl, children of our school laundress, aged respectively eight and six, who, seeing a little fellow in the water out of depth, and sinking twice, before the third time jumped in to save him, though unable to swim themselves; the girl aged six first, we are sorry to say, but the brother, Robert Coop, followed her example, and together they made a line, and she caught

hold of the drowning boy, and he held her petycoats, and so they pulled. We have seen the place: it is not a nice one. They got him ashore at last. The park-keeper here going along found them dripping, rubbing his hands, and blowing into his nostrils. Name, T. Shellen, son of a small cobbler here, and recovered.

'May it please your Lordship, we make bold to apply, because you have been for a number of years, as far as the oldest can recollect, the Hero of our school, and we are so bold as to ask the favour of General Lord Ormont's name to head a subscription we are making to circulate for the support of their sick mother, who has fallen ill. We think her a good woman. Gentlemen and ladies of the neighbourhood are willing to subscribe. If we have a great name to head the list, we think we shall make a good subscription. Names:—

'Martha Mary Coop, mother.
'Robert Coop.
'Jane Coop, the girl, aged six.

'If we are not taking too great a liberty, a subscription paper will follow. We are sure General the Earl of Ormont's name will help to make them comfortable.

'We are obediently and respectfully,

'David Gowen,
'Walter Bench,
'James Panners Parsons,
'And seven others.'

Weyburn spared Aminta an answering look, that would have been a begging of Browny to remember Matey.

'It 's genuine,' he said to Mrs. Lawrence, as he attacked his plate with the gusto for the repast previously and benignly observed by her. 'It ought to be the work of some of the younger fellows.'

'They spell correctly, on the whole.'

'Excepting,' said my lord, 'an article they don't know much about yet.'

Weyburn had noticed the word, and he smiled. 'Said to be the happy state! The three signing their names are probably what we called bellman and beemen, collector, and heads of the swarm—enthusiasts. If it is not the work of some of the younger hands, the school has levelled on minors. In any case it shows the school is healthy.'

'I subscribe,' said Mrs. Lawrence.

'The little girl aged six shall have something done for her,' said Aminta, and turned her eyes on the earl.

He was familiar with her thrilled voice at a story of bravery. He said—

'The boys don't say the girl's brother turned tail.'

'Only that the girl's brother aged eight followed the lead of the little girl aged six,' Mrs. Lawrence remarked. 'Well, I like the schoolboys, too—"we are sorry to say!" But they 're good lads. Boys who can appreciate brave deeds are capable of doing them.'

'Speak to me about it on Monday,' the earl said to Weyburn.

He bowed, and replied—

'I shall have the day to-morrow. I 'll walk it and call on Messrs.' (he glanced at the paper) 'Gowen, Bench, and Parsons. I have a German friend in London anxious to wear his legs down stumpier.'

'The name of the school?'

'It is called Cuper's.'

Aminta, on hearing the name of Cuper a second time, congratulated herself on the happy invention of her pretext to keep Mrs. Pagnell from the table at midday. Her aunt had a memory for names: what might she not have exclaimed! There would have been little in it,

but it was as well that the 'boy of the name of Weyburn' at Cuper's should be unmentioned. By an exaggeration peculiar to a disgust in fancy, she could hear her aunt vociferating 'Weyburn!' and then staring at Mr. Weyburn opposite—perhaps not satisfied with staring.

He withdrew after his usual hearty meal, during which his talk of boys and their monkey tricks, and what we can train them to, had been pleasant generally, especially to Mrs. Lawrence. Aminta was carried back to the minute early years at High Brent. A line or two of a smile touched her cheek.

'Yes, my dear countess, that is the face I want for Lady de Culme to-day,' said Mrs. Lawrence. 'She likes a smiling face. Aunty-aunty has always been good; she has never been prim. I was too much for her, until I reflected that she was very old, and deserved to know the truth before she left us; and so I went to her; and then she said she wished to see the Countess of Ormont, because of her being my dearest friend. I fancy she entertains an *arriére* idea of proposing her flawless niece Gracey, Marchioness of Fencaster, to present you. She 's quite equal to the fatigue herself. You 'll rejoice in her anecdotes. People were virtuous in past days: they counted their sinners. In those days, too, as I have to understand, the men chivalrously bore the blame, though the women were rightly punished. Now, alas! the initiative is with the women, and men are not asked for chivalry. Hence it languishes. Lady de Culme won't hear of the Queen of Blondes; has forbidden her these many years!'

Lord Ormont, to whom the lady's prattle was addressed, kept his visage moveless, except in slight jerks of the brows.

'What queen?'

'You insist upon renewing my old, old pangs of

jealousy, my dear lord! The Queen of Cyprus, they called her, in the last generation; she fights our great duellist handsomely.'

'My dear Mrs. Lawrence!'

'He triumphs finally, we know, but she beats him every round.'

'It 's only tattle that says the duel has begun.'

'May is the month of everlasting beauty! There 's a widower marquis now who claims the right to cast the glove to any who dispute it.'

'Mrs. May is too good-looking to escape from scandal.'

'Amy May has the good looks of the Immortals.'

'She can't be thirty.'

'In the calendar of women she counts thirty-four.'

'Malignity! Her husband 's a lucky man.'

'The shots have proved it.'

Lord Ormont nodded his head over the hopeless task of defending a woman from a woman, and their sharp interchange ceased. But the sight of his complacency in defeat told Aminta that he did not respect his fair client: it drew a sketch of the position he allotted his wife before the world side by side with this Mrs. Amy May, though a Lady de Culme was persuaded to draw distinctions.

He had, however, quite complacently taken the dose intended for him by Mrs. Lawrence, who believed that the system of gently forcing him was the good one.

The ladies drove away in the afternoon. The earl turned his back on manuscript. He sent for a couple of walking-sticks, and commanded Weyburn to go through his *parades*. He was no tyro, merely out of practice, and unacquainted with the later, simpler form of the great master of the French school, by which, at serious issues, the guarding of the line can be more quickly done: as, for instance, the *parade de septime* supplanting

the slower *parade de prime*; the *parade de quarte* having advantage over the *parade de quinte*; the *parade de tierce* being readier and stronger than the *parade de sixte*; the same said for the *parade de seconde* instead of the weak *parade d'octave*.

These were then new points of instruction. Weyburn demonstrated them as neatly as he could do with his weapon.

'Yes, the French *think*,' Lord Ormont said, grasping the stick to get conviction of thumb-strength and finger-strength from the *parades* advocated; 'their steel would thread the ribs of our louts before they could raise a cry of parry; so here they 're pleased to sneer at fencing, as if it served no purpose but the duel. Fencing, for one thing, means, that with a good stick in his hand, a clever fencer can double up a giant or two, grant him choice of ground. Some of our men box; but the sword 's the weapon for an officer, and precious few of 'em are fit for more than to kick the scabbard. Slashing comes easier to them: a plaguey cut, if it does cut—say, one in six. Navy too. Their cutlass-drill is like a woman's fling of the arm to fetch a slap from behind her shoulder. Pinking beats chopping. These English 'll have their lesson. It 's like what you call good writing: the simple way does the business, and that 's the most difficult to learn, because you must give your head to it, as those French fellows do. *Trop de finesse* is rather their fault. Anything 's better than loutishness. Well! the lesson 'll come.'

He continued. He spoke as he thought: he was not speaking what he was thinking. His mind was directed on the visit of Aminta to Lady de Culme, and the tolerably wonderful twist whereby Mrs. Lawrence Finchley had vowed herself to his girl's interests. And he blamed neither of them; only he could not understand

how it had been effected, for Aminta and Mrs. Lawrence had not been on such particularly intimate terms last week or yesterday. His ejaculation, 'Women!' was, as he knew, merely ignorance roaring behind a mask of sarcasm. But it allied him with all previous generations on the male side, and that was its virtue. His view of the shifty turns of women got no further, for the reason that he took small account of the operations of the feelings, to the sole exercise of which he by system condemned the sex.

He was also insensibly half a grain more soured by the homage of those poor schoolboys, who called to him to take it for his reward in a country whose authorities had snubbed, whose Parliament had ignored, whose Press had abused him. The ridiculous balance made him wilfully oblivious that he had seen his name of late eulogized in articles and in books for the right martial qualities. Can a country treating a good soldier—not serving it for pay—in so scurvy a fashion, be struck too hard with our disdain? One cannot tell it in too plain a language how one despises its laws, its moralities, its sham of society. The Club, some choice anecdotists, two or three listeners to his dolences clothed as diatribes; a rubber, and the sight of his girl at home, composed, with a week's shooting now and then, his round of life now that she refused to travel. What a life for a soldier in his vigour!

Weyburn was honoured by the earl's company on the walk to Chiallo's. In the street of elegant shops they met Lord Adderwood, and he, as usual, appeared in the act of strangling one of his flock of yawns, with gentlemanly consideration for the public. Exercise was ever his temporary specific for these incurables. Flinging off his coat, he cast away the cynic style engendering or engendered by them. He and Weyburn were for a bout. Sir John Randeller and Mr. Morsfield were at it, like

Bull in training and desperado foiled. A French *maitre d'armes*, famed in *escrime*, standing near Captain Chiallo, looked amused in the eyes, behind a mask of professional correctness. He had come on an excursion for the display of his art. Sir John's very sturdy defence was pierced. Weyburn saluted the Frenchman as an acquaintance, and they shook hands, chatted, criticized, nodded. Presently he and his adversary engaged, vizored and in their buckram, and he soon proved to be too strong for Adderwood, as the latter expected and had notified to Lord Ormont before they crossed the steel. My lord had a pleasant pricking excitement in the sound. There was a pretty display between Weyburn and the *escrimeur*, who neatly and kindly trifled, took a point and returned one, and at the finish complimented him. The earl could see that he had to be sufficiently alert.

Age mouthed an ugly word to the veteran insensible of it in his body, when a desire to be one with these pairs of nimble wrists and legs was like an old gamecock shown the pit and put back into the basket. He left the place, carrying away an image of the coxcombical attitudinizing of the man Morsfield at the *salut*, upon which he brought down his powers of burlesque.

My lord sketched the scene he had just quitted to a lady who had stopped her carriage. She was the still beautiful Mrs. Amy May, wife of the famous fighting captain. Her hair was radiant in a shady street; her eyelids tenderly toned round the almond enclosure of blue pebbles, bright as if shining from the seawash. The lips of the fair woman could be seen to say that they were sweet when, laughing or discoursing, they gave sight of teeth proudly her own, rivalling the regularity of the grin of dentistry. A Venus of nature was melting into a Venus of art, and there was a decorous concealment of the contest and the anguish in the

process, for which Lord Ormont liked her well enough to wink benevolently at her efforts to cheat the world at various issues, and maintain her duel with Time. The world deserved that she should beat it, even if she had been all deception.

She let the subject of Mr. Morsfield pass without remark from her, until the exhaustion of open-air topics hinted an end of their conversation, and she said—

'We shall learn next week what to think if the civilians. I have heard Mr. Morsfield tell that he is *de première force*. Be on your guard. You are to know that I never forget a service, and you did me one once.'

'You have reason . . . ?' said the earl.

'If anybody is the dragon to the treasure he covets he is a spadassin who won't hesitate at provocations. Adieu.'

Lord Ormont's eye had been on Mr. Morsfield. He had seen what Mrs. Pagnell counselled her niece to let him see. He thanked Mr. Morsfield for a tonic that made him young with anticipations of bracing; and he set his head to work upon an advance half-way to meet the gentleman, and safely exclude his wife's name.

Monday brought an account of Cuper's boys. Aminta received it while the earl was at his papers for the morning's news of the weightier deeds of men.

They were the right boys, Weyburn said; his interview with Gowen, Bench, Parsons, and the others assured him that the school was breathing big lungs. Mr. Cuper, too, had spoken well of them.

'You walked the twenty miles?' Aminta interrupted him.

'With my German friend: out and home; plenty of time in the day. He has taken to English boys, but asks why enthusiasm and worship of great deeds don't grow upward from them to their elders. And I, in turn,

ask why Germans insist on that point more even than the French do.'

'Germans are sentimental. But the English boys he saw belonged to a school with traditions of enthusiasm sown by some one. The school remembered?'

'Curiously, Mr. Cuper tells me, the hero of the school has dropped and sprung up, stout as ever, twice—it tells me what I wish to believe—since Lord Ormont led their young heads to glory. He can't say how it comes. The tradition 's there, and it 's kindled by some flying spark.'

'They remember who taught the school to think of Lord Ormont?'

'I 'm a minor personage. I certainly did some good, and that 's a push forward.'

'They speak of you?'

It was Aminta more than the Countess of Ormont speaking to him.

'You take an interest in the boys,' he said, glowing. 'Yes, well, they have their talks. I happened to be a cricketer, counting wickets and scores. I don't fancy it 's remembered that it was I preached my lord. A day of nine wickets and one catch doesn't die out of a school. The boy Gowen was the prime spirit in getting up the subscription for the laundress. But Bench and Parsons are good boys, too.'

He described them, dwelt on them. The enthusiast, when not lyrical, is perilously near to boring. Aminta was glad of Mrs. Lawrence's absence. She had that feeling because Matthew Weyburn would shun talk of himself to her, not from a personal sense of tedium in hearing of the boys; and she was quaintly reminded by suggestions, coming she knew not whence, of a dim likeness between her and these boys of the school when their hero dropped to nothing and sprang up again

brilliantly—a kind of distant cousinship, in her susceptibility to be kindled by so small a flying spark as this one on its travels out of High Brent. Moreover, the dear boys tied her to her girlhood, and netted her fleeting youth for the moth-box. She pressed to hear more and more of them, and of the school-laundress Weyburn had called to see, and particularly of the child, little Jane, aged six. Weyburn went to look at the sheet of water to which little Jane had given celebrity over the county. The girl stood up to her shoulders when she slid off the bank and made the line for her brother to hold, he in the water as well. Altogether, Cuper's boys were justified in promoting a subscription, the mother being helpless.

'Modest little woman,' he said of Jane. 'We 'll hope people won't spoil her. Don't forget, Lady Ormont, that the brother did his part; he had more knowledge of the danger than she.'

'You will undertake to convey our subscriptions? Lord Ormont spoke of the little ones and the schoolboys yesterday.'

'I 'll be down again among them next Sunday, Lady Ormont. On the Monday I go to Olmer.'

'The girls of High Brent subscribe?'

There was a ripple under Weyburn's gravity.

'Messrs. Gowen, Bench, and Parsons thought proper to stop Miss Vincent at the head of her detachment in the park.'

'On the Sunday?'

'And one of them handed her a paper containing a report of their interview with Mrs. Coop and a neat eulogy of little Jane. But don't suspect them, I beg. I believe them to be good, honest fellows. Bench, they say, is religious; Gowen has written verses; Parsons generally harum-scarum. They 're boyish in one way

or another, and that 'll do. The cricket of the school has been low: seems to be reviving.'

'Mr. Weyburn,' said the countess, after a short delay —and Aminta broke through—'it pleases me to hear of them, and think they have not forgotten you, or, at least, they follow the lead you gave. I should like to know whether an idea I have is true: Is much, I mean constant, looking down on young people likely to pull one's mind down to their level?'

'Likely enough to betray our level, if there 's danger,' he murmured. 'Society offers an example that your conjecture is not unfounded, Lady Ormont. But if we have great literature and an interest in the world's affairs, can there be any fear of it? The schoolmaster ploughs to make a richer world, I hope. He must live with them, join with them in their games, accustom them to have their heads knocked with what he wants to get into them, leading them all the while, as the bigger schoolfellow does, if he is a good fellow. He has to be careful not to smell of his office. Doing positive good is the business of his every day—on a small scale, but it 's positive, if he likes his boys. Avaunt favouritism!— he must like all boys. And it 's human nature not so far removed from the dog; only it 's a supple human nature: there 's the beauty of it. We train it. Nothing is more certain than that it will grow upward. I have the belief that I shall succeed, because I like boys, and they like me. It always was the case.'

'I know,' said Aminta.

Their eyes met. She looked moved at heart behind that deep forest of her chestnut eyes.

'And I think I can inspire confidence in fathers and mothers,' he resumed. 'I have my boys already waiting for me to found the school. I was pleased the other day: an English friend brought an Italian gentleman to

see me and discuss my system, up at Norwood, at my mother's—a Signor Calliani. He has a nephew; the parents dote on him. The uncle confesses that the boy wants—he has got hold of our word—"pluck." We had a talk. He has promised to send me the lad when I am established in Switzerland.'

'When?' said Aminta.

'A relative from whom a Reversion comes is near the end. It won't be later than September that I shall go. My Swiss friend has the school, and would take me at once before he retires.'

'You make friends wherever you go,' said Aminta.

'Why shouldn't everybody? I'm convinced it's because I show people I mean well, and I never nurse an injury, great or small. And besides, they see I look forward. I do hope good for the world. If at my school we have all nationalities—French boys and German, Italian, Russian, Spaniard—without distinction of race and religion and station, and with English intermixing—English games, English sense of honour and conception of gentleman—we shall help to nationalize Europe. Emile Grenat, Adolf Fleischer, and an Italian, Vincentino Chiuse, are prepared to start with me: and they are men of attainments; they will throw up their positions; they will do me the honour to trust to my leadership. It's not scaling Alps or commanding armies, true.'

'It may be better,' said Aminta, and thought as she spoke.

'Slow work, if we have a taste for the work, doesn't dispirit. Otherwise, one may say that an African or South American traveller has a more exciting time. I shall manage to keep my head on its travels.'

'You have ideas about the education of girls?'

'They can't be carried out unaided.'

'Aid will come.'

Weyburn's confidence, high though it was, had not mounted to that pitch.

'One may find a mate,' he said. The woman to share and practically to aid in developing such ideas is not easily found: that he left as implied.

Aminta was in need of poetry; but the young schoolmaster's plain, well-directed prose of the view of a business in life was welcome to her.

Lord Ormont entered the room. She reminded him of the boys of High Brent and the heroine Jane. He was ready to subscribe his five-and-twenty guineas, he said. The amount of the sum gratified Weyburn, she could see. She was proud of her lord, and of the boys and the little girl; and she would have been happy to make the ardent young schoolmaster aware of her growing interest in the young.

The night before the earl's departure on the solitary expedition to which she condemned him, he surprised her with a visit of farewell, so that he need not disturb her in the early morning, he said. She was reading beside her open jewel-box, and she closed it with the delicate touch of a hand turned backward while listening to him, with no sign of nervousness.

CHAPTER XIII

WAR AT OLMER

Lively doings were on the leap to animate Weyburn at Olmer during Easter week. The Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey, rector of Barborough, on hearing that Lady Charlotte Eglett was engaged in knocking at the doors

of litigation with certain acts that constituted distinct breaches of the law and the peace, and were a violation of the rights of her neighbour, Mr. Gilbert Addicote, might hope that the troublesome parishioner whom he did not often number among his congregation would grant him a term of repose. Therein he was deceived. Alterations and enlargements of the church, much required, had necessitated the bricking up of a door regarded by the lady as the private entrance to the Olmer pew. She sent him notice of her intention to batter at the new brickwork; so there was the prospect of a pew-fight before him. But now she came to sit under him every Sunday; and he could have wished her absent, for she diverted his thoughts from piety to the selection of texts applicable in the case of a woman who sat with arms knotted, and the frown of an intemperate schoolgirl forbidden speech; while her pew's firelight startlingly at intervals danced her sinister person into view, as from below. The lady's inaccessible and unconquerable obtuseness to exhortation informed the picture with an evil spirit that cried for wrestlings.

Regularly every week-day she headed the war now rageing between Olmer and Addicotes, on the borders of the estates. It was open war, and herself to head the cavalry. Weyburn, driving up a lane in the gig she had sent to meet the coach, beheld a thicket of countrymen and boys along a ridge; and it swayed and broke, and through it burst the figure of a mounted warrior woman at the gallop, followed by what bore an appearance of horse and gun, minus carriage, drivers at the flanks cracking whips on foot. Off went the train, across a small gorse common, through a gate.

'That 's another down,' said his whip. 'Sound good wood it is, not made to fall. Her ladyship 's at it hard to-day. She 'll teach Mr. Addicote a thing or two about

things females can do. That is, when they stand for their rights.'

He explained to Weyburn that Mr. Addicote, a yeoman farmer and a good hunting man, but a rare obstinate one, now learning his lesson from her ladyship, was in dispute with her over rights of property on a stretch of fir-trees lining the ridge where the estates of Olmer and Addicotes met. Her ladyship had sworn that if he did not yield to her claim she would cut down every tree of the ridge and sell the lot for timber under his nose. She acted according to her oath, in the teeth of his men two feet across the border. All the world knew the roots of those trees were for the most part in Olmer soil, though Addicote shared the shade. All the people about mourned for the felling of those trees. All blamed Mr. Gilbert Addicote for provoking her ladyship, good hunting man though he was. But as to the merits of the question, under the magnifier of the gentlemen of the law, there were as many different opinions as wigs in the land.

'And your opinion?' said Weyburn.

To which the young groom answered: 'Oh, I don't form an opinion, sir. I 'm of my mistress's opinion; and if she says, Do it, think as we like, done it has to be.'

Lady Charlotte came at a trot through the gate, to supervise the limbering-up of another felled tree. She headed it as before. The log dragged bounding and twirling, rattling its chains; the crowd along the ridge, forbidden to cheer, watching it with intense repression of the roar. We have not often in England sight of a great lady challengeing an unpopular man to battle and smacking him in the face like this to provoke him. Weyburn was driven on a half-circle of the lane to the gate, where he jumped out to greet Lady Charlotte trotting

back for another smack in the face of her enemy,—a third rounding of her Troy with the vanquished dead at her heels, as Weyburn let a flimsy suggestion beguile his fancy, until the Homeric was overwhelming even to a playful mind, and he put her in a mediæval frame. She really had the heroical aspect in a grandiose-grotesque, fitted to some lines of Ariosto. Her head wore a close hood, disclosing a fringe of grey locks, owlish to see about features hooked for action.

'Ah, you! there you are: good—I 'll join you in three minutes,' she sang out to him, and cantered to the ridge.

Hardly beyond the stated number she was beside him again, ranging her steed for the victim log to dance a gyration on its branches across the lane and enter a field among the fallen compeers. One of her men had run behind her. She slid from her saddle and tossed him the reins, catching up her skirts.

'That means war, as much as they 'll have it in England,' she said, seeing his glance at the logs. 'My husband 's wise enough to leave it to me, so I save him trouble with neighbours. An ass of a Mr. Gilbert Addicote dares us to make good our claim on our property, our timber, because half a score of fir-tree roots go stretching on to his ground.'

She swished her whip. Mr. Gilbert Addicote received the stroke and retired, a buried subject. They walked on at an even pace. 'You 'll see Leo to-morrow. He worships you. You may as well give him a couple of hours' coaching a day for the week. He 'll be hanging about you, and you won't escape him. Well, and my brother Rowsley: how is Lord Ormont? He never comes to me now, since—— Well, it 's nothing to me; but I like to see my brother. She can't make any change here.' Olmer and Lady Charlotte 's bosom were

both implied. 'What do you think?—you 've noticed: is he in good health? It 's the last thing he 'll be got to speak of.'

Weyburn gave the proper assurances.

'Not he!' said she. 'He 's never ill. Men beat women in the long race, if they haven't overdone it when young. My doctor wants me to renounce the saddle. He says it 's time. Not if I 've got work for horseback!' she nicked her head emphatically: 'I hate old age. They sha'nt dismount me till a blow comes. Hate it! But I should despise myself if I showed signs, like a worm under heel. Let Nature do her worst; she can't conquer us as long as we keep up heart. You won't have to think of that for a good time yet. Now tell me why Lord Ormont didn't publish the "Plan for the Defence" you said he was writing; and he was, I know. He wrote it and he finished it; you made the fair copy. Well, and he read it,—there! see!' She took the invisible sheets in her hands and tore them. 'That 's my brother. He 's so proud. It would have looked like asking the country, that injured him, to forgive him. I wish it had been printed. But whatever he does I admire. That—she might have advised, if she 'd been a woman of public spirit or cared for his reputation. He never comes near me. Did she read your copy?'

The question was meant for an answer.

Weyburn replied: 'Lady Ormont had no sight of it.'

'Ah! she 's Lady Ormont to the servants, I know. She has an aunt living in the house. If my brother 's a sinner, and there 's punishment for him, he has it from that aunt. Pag . . . something. He bears with her. He 's a Spartan. She 's his pack on his back, for what she covers and the game he plays. It looks just tolerably

decent with her in the house. She goes gabbling a story about our Embassy at Madrid. To preserve propriety, as they call it. Her niece doesn't stoop to any of those tricks, I 'm told. I like her for that.'

Weyburn was roused: 'I think you would like Lady Ormont, if you knew her, my lady.'

'The chances of my liking the young woman are not in the dice-box. You call her Lady Ormont: you are not one of the servants. Don't call her Lady Ormont to me.'

'It is her title, Lady Charlotte.'

She let fly a broadside at him.

'You are one of the woman's dupes. I thought you had brains. How can you be the donkey not to see that my brother Rowsley, Lord Ormont, would never let a woman, lawfully bearing his name, go running the quadrille over London in couples with a Lady Staines and a Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, Lord Adderwood, and that man Morsfield, who boasts of your Lady Ormont, and does it unwhipped—tell me why? Pooh, you must be the poorest fool born to suppose it possible my brother would allow a man like that man Morsfield to take his wife's name in his mouth a second time. Have you talked much with this young person?'

'With Lady Ormont? I have had the honour occasionally.'

'Stick to the title and write yourself plush-breech. Can't you be more than a footman? Try to be a man of the world; you 're old enough for that by now. I know she 's good-looking; the whole tale hangs on that. You needn't be singing me mooncalf hymn tunes of "Lady Ormont, Lady Ormont," solemn as a parson's clerk; the young woman brought good looks to market; and she got the exchange she had a right to expect. But it 's not my brother Rowsley's title she has got—except

for footmen and tradesmen. When there 's a true Countess of Ormont! . . . Unless my brother has cut himself from his family. Not he. He 's not mad.'

They passed through Olmer park-gates. Lady Charlotte preceded him, and she turned, waiting for him to rejoin her. He had taken his flagellation in the right style, neither abashed nor at sham crow: he was easy, ready to converse on any topic; he kept the line between supple courtier and sturdy independent; and he was a pleasant figure of a young fellow. Thinking which, a reminder that she liked him drew her by the road of personal feeling, as usual with her, to reflect upon another, and a younger, woman's observing and necessarily liking him too.

'You say you fancy I should like the person you call Lady Ormont?'

'I believe you would, my lady.'

'Are her manners agreeable?'

'Perfect; no pretension.'

'Ah! she sings, plays—all that?'

'She plays the harp and sings.'

'You have heard her?'

'Twice.'

'She didn't set you mewing?'

'I don't remember the impulse; at all events, it was restrained.'

'She would me; but I 'm an old woman. I detest their squalling and strumming. I can stand it with Italians on the boards: they don't stop conversation. She was present at that fencing-match where you plucked a laurel? I had an account of it. I can't see the use of fencing in this country. Younger women can, I dare say. Now, look. If we 're to speak of her, I can't call her Lady Ormont, and I don't want to hear you. Give me her Christian name.'

'It is'—Weyburn found himself on a slope without a stay—'Aminta.'

Lady Charlotte's eye was on him. He felt intolerably hot; his vexation at the betrayal of the senseless feeling made it worse, a conscious crimson.

'Aminta,' said she, rather in the style of Cuper's boys, when the name was a strange one to them. 'I remember my Italian master reading out a poem when I was a girl. I read poetry then. You wouldn't have imagined that. I did, and liked it. I hate old age. It changes you so. None of my children know me as I was when I had life in me and was myself, and my brother Rowsley called me Cooey. They think me a hard old woman. I was Cooey through the woods and over the meadows and down stream to Rowsley. Old age is a prison wall between us and young people. They see a miniature head and bust, and think it a flattery—won't believe it. After I married I came to understand that the world we are in is a world to fight in, or under we go. But I pity the young who have to cast themselves off and take up arms. Young women above all.'

Why had she no pity for Aminta? Weyburn asked it of his feelings, and he had the customary insurgent reply from them.

'You haven't seen Steignton yet,' she continued. 'No place on earth is equal to Steignton for me. It 's got the charm. Here at Olmer I 'm a mother and a grandmother—the "devil of an old woman" my neighbours take me to be. She hasn't been to Steignton either. No, and won't go there, though she 's working her way round, she supposes. He 'll do everything for his "Aminta," but he won't take her to Steignton. I 'm told now she 's won Lady de Culme. That Mrs. Lawrence Finchley has dropped the curtsey to her great-aunt and sworn to be a good girl, for a change, if Lady

de Culme will do the chaperon, and force Lord Ormont's hand. My brother shrugs. There 'll be a nice explosion one day soon. Presented? The Court won't have her. That I know for positive. If she 's pushed forward, she 'll be bitterly snubbed. It 's on the heads of those women—silly women! I can't see the game Mrs. Lawrence Finchley 's playing. She 'd play for fun. If they 'd come to me, I 'd tell them I 've proof she 's not the Countess of Ormont: positive proof. You look? I have it. I hold something; and not before,—(he may take his Aminta to Steignton, he may let her be presented, she may wear his name publicly, I say he 's laughing at them, snapping his fingers at them louder and louder the more they seem to be pushing him into a corner, until—I know my brother Rowsley!—and, poor dear fellow! a man like that, the best cavalry general England ever had:—they 'll remember it when there comes a cry for a general from India: that 's the way with the English; only their necessities teach them to be just!)—he to be reduced to be out-manœuvring a swarm of women,—I tell them, not before my brother Rowsley comes to me for what he handed to my care and I keep safe for him, will I believe he has made or means to make his Aminta Countess of Ormont.'

They were at the steps of the house. Turning to Weyburn there, the inexhaustible Lady Charlotte remarked that their conversation had given her pleasure. Leo was hanging on to one of his hands the next minute. A small girl took the other. Philippa and Beatrice were banished damsels.

Lady Charlotte's breath had withered the aspect of Aminta's fortunes. Weyburn could forgive her, for he was beginning to understand her. He could not pardon 'her brother Rowsley,' who loomed in his mind incomprehensible, and therefore black. Once he had thought

the great General a great man. He now regarded him as a mere soldier, a soured veteran; socially as a masker and a trifler, virtually a callous angler playing his cleverly-hooked fish for pastime.

What could be the meaning of Lady Charlotte's 'that man Morsfield, who boasts of your Lady Ormont, and does it unwhipped'?

Weyburn stopped his questioning, with the reflection that he had no right to recollect her words thus accurately.

The words, however, stamped Morsfield's doings and sayings and postures in the presence of Aminta with significance. When the ladies were looking on at the fencers, Morsfield's perfect coxcombry had been noticeable. He knew the art of airing a fine figure. Mrs. Lawrence Finchley had spoken of it, and Aminta had acquiesced; in the gravely simple manner of women who may be thinking of it much more intently than the vivacious prattler. Aminta confessed to an admiration of masculine physical beauty; the picador, matador, of the Spanish ring called up an undisguised glow that English ladies show coldly when they condescend to let it be seen; as it were, a line or two of colour on the wintriest of skies. She might, after all, at heart be one of the leisured, jewelled, pretty-winged; the spending, never harvesting, world she claimed and sought to enter. And what a primitive world it was!—world of the glittering beast and the not too swiftly flying prey; the savage passions clothed in silk. Surely desire to belong to it writes us poor creatures. Mentally, she could hardly be maturer than the hero-worshipping girl in the procession of Miss Vincent's young seminarists. Probably so, but she carried magic. She was of the order of women who walk as the goddesses of old, bearing the gift divine. And, by the way, she had the step of the goddess. Weyburn repeated to himself the favourite

familiar line expressive of the glorious walk, and accused Lord Ormont of being in cacophonous accordance with the perpetual wrong of circumstance, he her possessor, the sole person of her sphere insensible to the magic she bore! So ran his thought.

The young man chose to conceive that he thought abstractedly. He was, in truth, often casting about for the chances of his meeting on some fortunate day the predestined schoolmaster's wife: a lady altogether praiseworthy for carrying principles of sound government instead of magic. Consequently, susceptible to woman's graces though he knew himself to be, Lady Ormont's share of them hung in the abstract for him. His hopes were bent on an early escape to Switzerland and his life's work.

Lady Charlotte mounted to ride to the battle daily. She talked of her brother Rowsley, and of 'Aminta,' and provoked an advocacy of the Countess of Ormont, and trampled the pleas and defences to dust, much in the same tone as on the first day; sometimes showing a peep of sweet humaneness, like the ripe berry of a bramble, and at others rattling thunder at the wretch of a woman audacious enough to pretend to a part in her brother's title.

Not that she had veneration for titles. She considered them a tinsel, and the devotee on his knee-caps to them a lump for a kick. Adding: 'Of course I stand for my class; and if we can't have a manlier people—and it 's not likely in a country treating my brother so badly—well, then, let things go on as they are.' But it was the pretension to a part in the name of Ormont which so violently offended the democratic aristocrat, and caused her to resent it as an assault on the family honour, by 'a woman springing up out of nothing'—a woman of no distinctive birth.

She was rational in her fashion; or Weyburn could at least see where and how the reason in her took a twist. The Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey would not see it; he was, in charity to her ladyship, of a totally contrary opinion, he informed Weyburn. The laborious pastor and much-enduring Churchman met my lady's apologist as he was having a swing of the legs down the lanes before breakfast, and he fell upon a series of complaints, which were introduced by a declaration that 'he much feared' her ladyship would have a heavy legal bill to pay for taking the law into her hands up at Addicotes.

Her ladyship might, if she pleased, he said, encourage her domestics and her husband's tenants and farm-labourers to abandon the church for the chapel, and go, as she had done and threatened to do habitually, to the chapel herself; but to denounce the ritual of the Orthodox Church under the denomination of 'barbarous,' to say of the invoking supplications of the service, that they were—she had been heard to state it more or less publicly and repeatedly—suitable to abject ministers and throngs at the court of an Indian rajah, *that* he did not hesitate to term highly unbecoming in a lady of her station, subversive and unchristian. The personal burdens inflicted on him by her ladyship he prayed for patience to endure. He surprised Weyburn in speaking of Lady Charlotte as 'educated and accomplished.' She was rather more so than Weyburn knew, and more so than was common among the great ladies of her time.

Weyburn strongly advised the reverend gentleman on having it out with Lady Charlotte in a personal interview. He sketched the great lady's combative character on a foundation of benevolence, and stressed her tolerance for open dealing, and the advantage gained by personal dealings with her—after a mauling or two. His language and his illustrations touched an old-school

chord in the Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey, who hummed over the project, profoundly disrelishing the introductory portion.

'Do me the honour to call and see me to-morrow, after breakfast, before her ladyship starts for the fray on Addicote heights,' Weyburn said; 'and I will ask your permission to stand by you. Her bark is terrific, we know; and she can bite, but there 's no venom.'

Finally, on a heave of his chest, Mr. Hampton-Evey consented to call, in the interests of peace.

Weyburn had said it must be 'man to man with her, facing her and taking steps'; and, although the prospect was unpleasant to repulsiveness, it was a cheerful alternative beside Mr. Hampton-Evey's experiences and anticipations of the malignant black power her ladyship could be when she was not faced.

'Let the man come,' said Lady Charlotte. Her shoulders intimated readiness for him.

She told Weyburn he might be present—insisted to have him present. During the day Weyburn managed to slide in observations on the favourable reports of Mr. Hampton-Evey's work among the poor—emollient doses that irritated her to fret and paw, as at a checking of her onset.

In the afternoon the last disputed tree on the Addicotes' ridge was felled and laid on Olmer ground. Riding with Weyburn and the joyful Leo, she encountered Mr. Eglett and called out the news. He remarked, in the tone of philosophy proper to a placable country gentleman obedient to government on foreign affairs: 'Now for the next act. But no more horseback now, mind!'

She muttered of not recollecting a promise. He repeated the interdict. Weyburn could fancy seeing her lips form words of how she hated old age.

He had been four days at Olmer, always facing her, 'man to man,' in the matter of Lady Ormont, not making way at all, but holding firm, and winning respectful treatment. They sat alone in her private room, where, without prelude, she discharged a fiery squib at impudent hussies caught up to the saddle-bow of a hero for just a canter, and pretending to a permanent seat beside him.

'You have only to see Lady Ormont; you will admit the justice of her claim, my lady,' said he; and as evidently he wanted a fight, she let him have it.

'You try to provoke me; you take liberties. You may call the woman Aminta, I 've told you; you insult me when you call the woman by my family name.'

'Pardon me, my lady: I have no right to call Lady Ormont Aminta.'

'You 've never done so, eh? Say!'

She had him at the edge of the precipice. He escaped by saying, 'Her Christian name was asked the other day, and I mentioned it. She is addressed by me as Lady Ormont.'

'And by her groom and her footman. They all do; it 's the indemnity to that class of young woman. Her linendraper is Lady-Ormonting as you do. I took you for a gentleman. Let me hear you give her that title again, you shall hear her true one, that the world fits her with, from me.'

The time was near the half-hour bell before dinner, the situation between them that of the fall of the breath to fetch words electrical. She left it to him to begin the fight, and was not sorry that she had pricked him for it.

A footman entered the room, bearer of a missive for Mr. Weyburn. Lord Ormont's groom had brought it from London.

'Send in the man,' said Lady Charlotte.

Weyburn read:—

'The Countess of Ormont begs Mr. Weyburn to return instantly. There has been an accident in his home. It may not be very serious. An arm—a shock to the system from a fall. Messenger informs her, fear of internal hæmorrhage. Best doctors in attendance.'

He handed Lady Charlotte the letter. She humped at the first line, flashed across the remainder, and in a lowered voice asked—

'Sister in the house?'

'My mother,' Weyburn said.

The groom appeared. He knew nothing. The Countess had given him orders to spare no expense on the road to Olmer, without a minute's delay. He had ridden and driven.

He looked worn. Lady Charlotte rang the bell for her butler. To him she said—

'See that this man has a good feed of meat, any pastry you have, and a bottle of port wine. He has earned a pipe of tobacco; make up a bed for him. Despatch at once any one of the stable-boys to Loughton—the Dolphin. Mr. Leeman there will have a chariot, fly, gig, anything, ready-horsed in three hours from now. See Empson yourself; he will put my stepper Mab to the light trap; no delay. Have his feed at Loughton. Tell Mrs. Maples to send up now, here, a tray, whatever she has, within five minutes—not later. A bottle of the Peace of Amiens Chambertin—Mr. Eglett's. You understand. Mrs. Maples will pack a basket for the journey; she will judge. Add a bottle of the Waterloo Bordeaux. Wait: a dozen of Mr. Eglett's cigars. Brisk with all the orders. Go.'

She turned to Weyburn. 'You pack your portmanteau faster than a servant will do it.'

He ran up-stairs.

She was beside the tray to welcome and inspirit his eating, and she performed the busy butler's duty in pouring out wine for him. It was a toned old Burgundy, happy in the year of its birth, the grandest of instruments to roll the gambol-march of the Dionysiaca through the blood of this frame and sound it to the spirit. She spoke no word of his cause for departure. He drank, and he felt what earth can do to cheer one of her stricken children and strengthen the beat of a heart with a dread like a shot in it.

She, while he flew supporting the body of his most beloved to the sun of Life in brighter hope, reckoned the stages of his journey.

'Leeman at Loughton will post you through the night to Mersley. Wherever you bait, it is made known that you come from Olmer, and are one of us. That passes you on up to London. Where can Lord Ormont be now?'

'In Paris.'

'Still in Paris? He leaves her. She did well to send as she did. You will not pay for the posting along the road.'

'I will pay for myself—I have a purse,' Weyburn said; and continued, 'Oh, my lady, there is Mr. Hampton-Evey to-morrow morning: I promised to stand by him.'

'I 'll explain,' said Lady Charlotte. 'He shall not miss you. If he strips the parson and comes as a man and a servant of the poor, he has nothing to fear. You 've done? The night before my brother Rowsley's first duel I sat with him at supper and poured his wine out, and knew what was going to happen, didn't say a word. No use in talking about feelings. Besides, death is only the other side of the ditch, and one or other of us must go foremost. Now then, good-bye. Empson 's waiting by

this time. Mr. Eglett and Leo shall hear the excuses from me. Think of anything you may want, while I count ten.'

She held his hand. He wanted her to be friendly to Lady Ormont, but could not vex her at the last moment, touched as he was by her practical kindness.

She pressed his hand and let it go.

CHAPTER XIV

OLD LOVERS NEW FRIENDS

The cottage inhabited by Weyburn's mother was on the southern hills over London. He reached it late in the afternoon. His mother's old servant, Martha, spied the roadway at the gate of the small square of garden. Her steady look without welcome told him the scene he would meet beyond the door, and was the dead in her eyes. He dropped from no height; he stood on a level with the blow. His apprehensions on the road had lowered him to meet it.

'Too late, Martha?'

'She 's in heaven, my dear.'

'She is lying alone?'

'The London doctor left half an hour back. She 's gone. Slipped, and fell, coming from her room, all the way down. She prayed for grace to see her son. She 'll watch over him, be sure. You 'll not find it lone and cold. A lady sits with it—Lady Ormont, they call her —a very kind lady. My mistress liked her voice. Ever since news of the accident, up to ten at night; and never eats or drinks more than a poor tiny bit of bread-and-butter, with a teacup.'

Weyburn went up-stairs.

Aminta sat close to the bedside in a darkened room. They greeted silently. He saw the white shell of the life that had flown; he took his mother's hand and kissed it, and knelt, clasping it.

Fear of disturbing his prayer kept Aminta seated.

Death was a stranger to him. The still warm, half-cold, nerveless hand smote the fact of things as they were through the prayer for things as we would have them. The vitality of his prayer was the sole light he had. It drew sustainment from the dead hand in his grasp, and cowered down to the earth claiming all we touch. He tried to summon vision of a soaring spirituality; he could not; his understanding and senses were too stricken. He prayed on. His prayer was as a little fountain, not rising high out of earth, and in the clutch of death; but its being it had from death, his love gave it food.

Prayer is power within us to communicate with the desired beyond our thirsts. The goodness of the dear good mother gone was in him for assurance of a breast of goodness to receive her, whatever the nature of the eternal secret may be. The good life gone lives on in the mind; the bad has but a life in the body, and that not lasting,—it extends, dispreads, it worms away, it perishes. Need we more to bid the mind perceive through obstructive flesh the God who reigns, a devil vanquished? Be certain that it is the pure mind we set to perceive. The God discerned in thought is another than he of the senses. And let the prayer be as a little fountain. Rising on a spout, from dread of the hollow below, the prayer may be prolonged in words begetting words, and have a pulse of fervour: the spirit of it has fallen after the first jet. That is the delirious energy of our craving, which has no life in our souls. We do not

get to any heaven by renouncing the Mother we spring from; and when there is an eternal secret for us, it is best to believe that Earth knows, to keep near her, even in our utmost aspirations.

Weyburn still knelt. He was warned to quit the formal posture of an exhausted act by the thought, that he had come to reflect upon how he might be useful to his boys in a like calamity.

Having risen, he became aware, that for some time of his kneeling Aminta's hand had been on his head, and they had raised their souls in unison. It was a soul's link. They gazed together on the calm, rapt features.

They passed from the room.

'I cannot thank you,' he said.

'Oh no; I have the reason for gratitude,' said she. 'I have learnt to know and love her, and hope I may imitate when my time is near.'

'She . . . at the last?'

'Peacefully; no pain. The breath had not left her very long before you came.'

'I said I cannot; but I must

'Do not.'

'Not in speech, then.'

They went into the tasteful little sitting-room below, where the stillness closed upon them as a consciousness of loss.

'You have comforted her each day,' he said.

'It has been my one happiness.'

'I could not wish for better than for her to have known you.'

'Say that for me. I have gained. She left her last words for you with me. They were love, love . . . pride in her son: thanks to God for having been thought worthy to give him birth.'

'She was one of the noble women of earth.'

'She was your mother. Let me not speak any more. I think I will now go. I am rarely given to these——'

The big drops were falling.

'You have not ordered your carriage?'

'It brings me here. I find my way home.'

'Alone?'

'I like the independence.'

'At night, too!'

'Nothing harmed me. Now it is daylight. A letter arrived for you from High Brent this morning. I forgot to bring it. Yesterday two of your pupils called here. Martha saw them.'

Her naming of the old servant familiarly melted him.

'You will not bear to hear praise or thanks.'

'If I deserved them. I should like you to call on Dr. Buxton; he will tell you more than we can. He drove with me the first day, after I had sent you the local doctor's report. I had it from the messenger, his assistant.'

Weyburn knew Dr. Buxton's address. He begged her to stay and take some nourishment; ventured a remark on her wasted look.

'It is poor fare in cottages.'

'I have been feeding on better than bread and meat,' she said. 'I should have eaten if I had felt appetite. My looks will recover, such as they are. I hope I have grown out of them; they are a large part of the bondage of women. You would like to see me safe into some conveyance. Go up-stairs for a few minutes; I will wait here.'

He obeyed her. Passing from the living to the dead, from the dead to the living, they were united in his heart.

Her brevity of tone, and her speech, so practical upon a point of need, under a crisis of distress, reminded him

of Lady Charlotte at the time of the groom's arrival with her letter.

Aminta was in no hurry to drive. She liked walking and looking down on London, she said.

'My friend and schoolmate, Selina Collett, comes to me at Whitsuntide. We have taken a house on the Upper Thames, above Marlow. You will come and see us, if you can be persuaded to leave your boys. We have a boathouse, and a bathing-plank for divers. The stream is quiet there between rich meadows. It seems to flow as if it *thought*. I am not poetical; I tell you only my impression. You shall be a great deal by yourself, as men prefer to be.'

'As men are forced to be—I beg!' said he. 'Division is against my theories.'

'We might help, if we understood one another, I have often fancied. I know something of your theories. I should much like to hear you some day on the scheme of the school in Switzerland, and also on the schoolmaster's profession. She whom we have lost was full of it, and spoke of it to me as much as her weakness would permit. The subject seemed to give her strength.'

'She has always encouraged me,' said Weyburn. 'I have lost her, but I shall feel that she is not absent. She had ideas of her own about men and women.'

'Some she mentioned.'

'And about marriage?'

'That too.'

Aminta shook herself out of a sudden stupor.

'Her mind was very clear up to the last hour upon all the subjects interesting her son. She at one time regretted his not being a soldier, for the sake of his father's memory. Then she learned to think he could do more for the world as the schoolmaster. She said you can persuade.'

'We had our talks. She would have the reason, if she was to be won. I like no other kind of persuasion.'

'I long to talk over the future school with you. That is, to hear your plans.'

They were at the foot of the hill, in view of an inn announcing livery stables. She wished to walk the whole distance. He shook his head.

The fly was ready for her soon, and he begged to see her safe home. She refused, after taking her seat, but said: 'At any other time. We are old friends. You will really go through the ceremony of consulting me about the school?'

He replied: 'I am honoured.'

'Ah, not to me,' said Aminta. 'We will be the friends we—— You will not be formal with me?—not from this day?'

She put out her hand. He took it gently. The dead who had drawn them together withheld a pressure.

Holding the hand, he said: 'I shall crave leave of absence for some days.'

'I shall see you on the day,' said she.

'If it is your desire: I will send word.'

'We both mourn at heart. We should be in company. Adieu.'

Their hands fell apart. They looked. The old school-time was in each mind. They saw it as a shore-bank in grey outline across morning mist. Years were between; and there was a division of circumstance, more repelling than an abyss or the rush of deep wild waters.

Neither of them had regrets. Under their cloud, and with the grief they shared, they were as happy as two could be in recovering one another as friends.

On the day of the funeral Aminta drove to the spot where they had parted; she walked to the churchyard.

She followed the coffin to its gravel-heap, wishing neither to see nor be seen, only that she might be so far attached to the remains of the dead; and the sense of blessedness she had in her bowed simplicity of feeling was as if the sainted dead had cleansed and anointed her.

When the sods had been cast on, the last word spoken, she walked her way back, happy in being alone, unnoticed. She was grateful to the chief mourner for letting her go as she had come. That helped her to her sense of purification, the haven out of the passions, hardly less quiet than the repose into which the dear dead woman, his mother, had entered.

London lay beneath her. The might of the great hive hummed at the verge of her haven of peace without disturbing. There she had been what none had known of her: an ambitious girl, modest merely for lack of intrepidity; paralyzed by her masterful lord; aiming her highest at a gilt weathercock; and a disappointed creature, her breast a home of serpents; never herself. She thought and hoped she was herself now. Alarm lest this might be another of her moods, victim of moods as she had latterly been, was a shadow armed with a dart playing round her to find the weak spot. It sprang from her acknowledged weakness of nature; and she cast about for how to keep it outside her and lean on a true though a small internal support. She struck at her desires, to sound them.

They were yesterday for love; partly for distinction, for a woman having beauty to shine in the sphere of beauty; but chiefly to love and be loved, therefore to live. She had yesterday read letters of a man who broke a music from the word—about as much music as there is in a tuning-fork, yet it rang and lingered; and he was not the magical musician. Now those letters were

as dust of the road. The sphere of beauty was a glass lamp-globe for delirious moths. She had changed. Belief in the real change gave her full view of the compliant coward she had been.

Her heart assured her she had natural courage. She felt that it could be stubborn to resist a softness. Now she cared no more for the hackneyed musical word; friendship was her desire. If it is not life's poetry, it is a credible prose; a land of low undulations instead of Alps; beyond the terrors and the deceptions. And she could trust her friend: he who was a singular constancy. His mother had told her of his preserving letters of a girl he loved when at school; and of his journeys to an empty house at Dover. That was past; but, as the boy, so the man would be in sincerity of feeling—trustworthy to the uttermost.

She mused on the friend. He was brave. She had seen how he took his blow, and sorrow as a sister, conquering emotion. It was not to be expected of him by one who knew him when at school. Had he faults? He must have faults. She, curiously, could see none. After consenting to his career as a schoolmaster, and seeing nothing ludicrous in it, she endowed him with the young school-hero's reputation, beheld him with the eyes of the girl who had loved him—and burnt his old letters! bitterly regretted that she burnt his letters!—and who had applauded his contempt of ushers and master opposing his individual will and the thing he thought it right to do.

Musing thus, she turned a corner, on a sudden, in her mind, and ran against a mirror, wherein a small figure running up to meet her, grew large and nodded, with the laugh and eyes of Browny. So little had she changed! The stedfast experienced woman rebuked that volatile, and some might say, faithless girl. But the girl had her

answer: she declared they were one and the same, affirmed that the years between were a bad night's dream, that her heart had been faithful, that he who conjures visions of romance in a young girl's bosom must always have her heart, as a crisis will reveal it to her. She had the volubility of the mettled Browny of old, and was lectured. When she insisted on shouting 'Matey! Matey!' she was angrily spurned and silenced.

Aminta ceased to recline in her carriage. An idea that an indolent posture fostered vapourish meditations, counselled her sitting rigidly upright and interestedly observing the cottages and merry gutter-children along the squat straight streets of a London suburb. Her dominant ultimate thought was, 'I, too, can work!' Like her courage, the plea of a capacity to work appealed for confirmation to the belief which exists without demonstrated example; and as she refrained from probing to the inner sources of that mental outcry, it was allowed to stand and remain among the convictions we store—wherewith to shape our destinies.

Childishly indeed, quite witlessly, she fell into a trick of repeating the name of Matthew Weyburn in her breast and on her lips, after the manner of Isabella Lawrence Finchley, when she had inquired for his Christian name, and went on murmuring it, as if sucking a new bonbon, with the remark: 'It sounds nice, it suits the mouth.' Little Selina Collett had told, Aminta remembered, how those funny boys at Cuper's could not at first get the name 'Aminta' to suit the mouth, but went about making hideous faces in uttering it. She smiled at the recollection, and thought, up to a movement of her lips, one is not tempted to do that in saying Matthew Weyburn!

CHAPTER XV

SHOWING A SECRET FISHED WITHOUT ANGLING

That great couchant dragon of the devouring jaws and the withering breath, known as our London world, was in expectation of an excitement above yawns on the subject of a beautiful Lady Doubtful proposing herself, through a group of infatuated influential friends, to a decorous Court, as one among the ladies acceptable. The popular version of it sharpened the sauce by mingling romance and cynicism very happily; for the numerous cooks, when out of the kitchen, will furnish a piquant dish. Thus, a jewel-eyed girl of half English origin (a wounded British officer is amiably nursed in a castle near the famous Peninsula battlefield, etc.), running wild down the streets of Seville, is picked up by Lord Ormont, made to discard her tambourine, brought over to our shores, and allowed the decoration of his name, without the legitimate adornment of his title. Discontented with her position after a time, she now pushes boldly to claim the place which will be most effective in serving her as a bath. She has, by general consent, beauty; she must, seeing that she counts influential friends, have witchery. Those who have seen her riding and driving beside her lord, speak of Andalusian grace, Oriental lustre, fit qualification for the fair slave of a notoriously susceptible old warrior.

She won a party in the widening gossip world; and enough of a party in the regent world to make a stream. Pretending to be the actual Countess of Ormont, though not publicly acknowledged as his countess by the earl, she had on her side the strenuous few who knew and

liked her, some who were pleased compassionately to patronize, all idle admirers of a shadowed beautiful woman at bay, the devotees of any beauty in distress, and such as had seen, such as imagined they had seen, such as could paint a mental picture of a lady of imposing stature, persuasive appearance, pathetic history, and pronounce her to be unjustly treated, with a general belief that she was visible and breathing. She had the ready enthusiasts, the responsive sentimentalists, and an honest active minor number, of whom not every one could be declared perfectly unspotted in public estimation, however innocent under verdict of the courts of law.

Against her was the livid cloud-bank over a flowery field, that has not yet spoken audible thunder: the terrible aggregate social woman, of man's creation, hated by him, dreaded, scorned, satirized, and nevertheless, upheld, esteemed, applauded: a mark of civilization, on to which our human society must hold as long as we have nothing humaner. She exhibits virtue, with face of waxen angel, with paw of desert beast, and blood of victims on it. Her fold is a genial climate and the material pleasures for the world's sheepy: worshipping herself, she claims the sanctification of a performed religion. She is gentle when unassailed, going her way serenely, with her malady in the blood. When the skin bears witness to it, she swallows an apothecary, and there is a short convulsion. She is refreshed by cutting off diseased inferior members: the superior betraying foul symptoms, she covers up and retains; rationally, too, for they minister to her present existence, and she lives all in the present. Her subjects are the mixed subservient; among her rebellious are earth's advanced, who have cold a morning on their foreheads, and these would not dethrone her, they would but shame and purify

by other methods than the druggist. She loves nothing. Undoubtedly, she dislikes the vicious. On that merit she subsists.

The vexatious thing in speaking of her is, that she compels to the use of the rhetorician's brass instrument. As she is one of the Powers giving life and death, one may be excused. This tremendous queen of the congregation has brought discredit on her sex for the scourge laid on quivering female flesh, and for the flippant indifference shown to misery and to fine distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad; and particularly for the undiscriminating hardness upon the starved of women. We forget her having been conceived in the fear of men, shaped to gratify them. She is their fiction of the state they would fain beguile themselves to suppose her sex has reached, for their benefit; where she may be queen of it in a corner, certain of a loyal support, if she will only give men her half-the-world's assistance to uplift the fabric comfortable to them; together with assurance of paternity, ease of mind in absence, exclusive possession, enormous and minutest, etc.; not by any means omitting a regimental orderliness, from which men are privately exempt, because they are men, or because they are grown boys—the brisker at lessons after a vacation or a truancy, says the fiction.

In those days the world had oscillated, under higher leading than its royal laxity, to rigidity. Tiny peccadilloes were no longer matter of jest, and the sinner exposed stood *sola* to receive the brand. A beautiful Lady Doubtful needed her husband's countenance if she was to take one of the permanent steps in public places. The party of Lady Charlotte Eglett called on the livid cloud-bank aforesaid to discharge celestial bolts and sulphur on the head of an impudent, underbred, ambitious young slut, whose arts had bewitched a

distinguished nobleman not young in years at least, and ensnared the remainder wits of some principal ancient ladies of the land. Professional Puritans, born conservatives, malicious tattlers, made up a goodly tail to Lady Charlotte's party. The epithet 'unbred' was accredited upon the quoted sayings and doings of the pretentious young person's aunt, repeated abroad by noblemen and gentlemen present when she committed herself; and the same were absurd. They carried a laugh, and so they lived and circulated. Lord Ormont submitted to the infliction of that horrid female in his household! It was no wonder he stopped short of allying himself with the family.

Nor was it a wonder that the naturally enamoured old warrior or invalided Mars (for she had the gift of beauty) should deem it prudent to be out of England when she and her crazy friends determined on the audacious move. Or put it the other way—for it is just as confounding right side or left—she and her friends take advantage of his absence to make the clever push for an establishment, and socially force him to legalize their union on his return. The deeds of the preceding reign had bequeathed a sort of legendary credence to the wildest tales gossip could invent under a demurrer.

But there was the fact, the earl was away. Lady Charlotte's party buzzed everywhere. Her ladyship had come to town to head it. Her ladyship laid trains of powder from dinner-parties, balls, routs, park-processions, into the Lord Chamberlain's ear, and fired and exploded them, deafening the grand official. Do you consider that virulent Pagan Goddesses and the flying torch-furies are extinct? Error of Christians! We have relinquished the old names and have no new ones for them; but they are here, inextinguishable, threading the day and night air with their dire squib-trail, if we

would but see. Hissing they go, and we do not hear. We feel the effects.

Upon the counsel of Mrs. Lawrence, Aminta sent a letter to Lord Ormont at his hotel in Paris, informing him of the position of affairs. He had delayed his return, and there had been none of his brief communications.

She wrote, as she knew, as she felt, coldly. She was guided by others, and her name was up before the world, owing to some half-remembered impulsion of past wishes, but her heart was numbed; she was not a woman to have a wish without a beat of the heart in it. For her name she had a feeling, to be likened rather to the losing gambler's contemplation of a big stake he has flung, and sees it gone while fortune is undecided; and he catches at a philosophy nothing other than his hug of a modest little background pleasure, that he has always preferred to this accursed bad habit of gambling with the luck against him. Reckless in the cast, she was reckless of success.

Her letter was unanswered.

Then, and day by day more strongly, she felt for her name. She put a false heart into it. She called herself to her hearing the Countess of Ormont, and deigned to consult the most foolish friend she could have chosen —her aunt; and even listened to her advice, that she should run about knocking at all the doors open to her, and state her case against the earl. It seemed the course to take, the moment for taking it. Was she not asked if she could now at last show she had pride? Her pride ran stinging through her veins, like a band of freed prisoners who head the rout to fire a city. She charged her lord with having designedly—oh! cunningly indeed —left her to be the prey of her enemies at the hour when he knew it behoved him to be her great defender. There

had been no disguise of the things in progress: they had been spoken of allusively, quite comprehensibly, after the fashion common with two entertaining a secret semi-hostility on a particular subject; one of them being the creature that blushes and is educated to be delicate, reserved, and timorous. He was not ignorant, and he had left her, and he would not reply to her letter!

So fell was her mood, that an endeavour to conjure up the scene of her sitting beside the death-bed of Matthew Weyburn's mother, failed to sober and smooth it, holy though that time was. The false heart she had put into the pride of her name was powerfuller than the heart in her bosom. But to what end had the true heart counselled her of late? It had been a home of humours and languors, an impotent insurgent, the sapper of her character; and as we see in certain disorderly States a curative incendiarism usurp the functions of the sluggish citizen, and the work of re-establishment done by destruction, in peril of a total extinction, Aminta's feverish anger on behalf of her name went a stretch to vivify and give her dulled character a novel edge. She said good-bye to cowardice. 'I have no husband to defend me—I must do it for myself.' The peril of a too complete exercise of independence was just intimated to her perceptions. On whom the blame? And let the motively guilty go mourn over consequences! That Institution of Marriage was eyed. Is it not a halting step to happiness? It is the step of a cripple; and one leg or the other poses for the feebler sex,—small is the matter which! And is happiness our cry? Our cry is rather for circumstance and occasion to use our functions, and the conditions are denied to women by Marriage—denied to the luckless of women, who are many, very many: denied to Aminta, calling herself

Countess of Ormont, for one; denied to Mrs. Lawrence Finchley for another, and in a base bad manner. She had defended her good name triumphantly, only to enslave herself for life or snatch at the liberty which besmirches.

Reviewing Mrs. Lawrence, Aminta's real heart pressed forward at the beat, in tender pity of the woman for whom a yielding to love was to sin; and unwomanly is the woman who does not love: men will say it. Aminta found herself phrasing, 'Why was she unable to love her husband?—he is not old.' She hurried in flight from the remark to confidences imparted by other ladies, showing strange veins in an earthy world; after which, her mind was bent to rebuke Mrs. Pagnell for the silly soul's perpetual allusions to Lord Ormont's age. She did not think of his age. But she was vividly thinking that she was young. Young, married, loveless, cramped in her energies, publicly dishonoured—a Lady Doubtful, courting one friend whom she liked among women, one friend whom she respected among men; that was the sketch of her.

That was in truth the outline, as much as Aminta dared sketch of herself without dragging her down lower than her trained instinct would bear to look. Our civilization shuns nature; and most shuns it in the most artificially civilized, to suit the market. They, however, are always close to their mother nature, beneath their second nature's mask of custom; and Aminta's unconscious concluding touch to the sketch: 'My husband might have helped me to a footing in Society,' would complete it as a coloured picture, if writ in tones.

She said it, and for the footing in Society she had lost her taste.

Mrs. Lawrence brought the final word from high quarters: that the application must be deferred until

Lord Ormont returned to town. It was known before, that such would be the decision. She had it from the eminent official himself, and she kicked about the room, setting her pretty mouth and nose to pout and sniff, exactly like a boy whose chum has been mishandled by a bully.

'Your dear good man is too much for us. I thought we should drive him. *C'est un rusé homme de guerre.* I like him, but I could slap him. He stops the way. Upon my word, he seems tolerably careless of his treasure. Does he suppose Mrs. Paggy is a protection? Do you know she 's devoted to that man Morsfield? He listens to her stories. To judge by what he shouts aloud, he intends carrying you off the first opportunity, divorcing, and installing you in Cobeck Hall. All he fears is, that your lord won't divorce. You should have seen him the other day; he marched up and down the room, smacking his head and crying out: "Legal measures or any weapons her husband pleases!" For he has come to believe that the lady would have been off with him long before, if her lord had no claim to the marital title. "It 's that husband I can't get over! that husband!" He reminded me, to the life, of Lawrence Finchley with a headache the morning after a supper, striding, with his hand on the shining middle of his head: "It 's that Welsh rabbit! that Welsh rabbit!" He has a poor digestion, and he will eat cheese. The Welsh rabbit chased him into his bed. But listen to me, dear, about your Morsfield. I told you he was dangerous.'

'He is not my Morsfield,' said Aminta.

'Beware of his having a tool in Paggy. He boasts of letters.'

'Mine? Two: and written to request him to cease writing to me.'

'He stops at nothing. And, oh, my Simplicity! don't you see you gave him a step in begging him to retire? Morsfield has lived a good deal among our neighbours, who expound the physiology of women. He anatomizes us; pulls us to pieces, puts us together, and then animates us with a breath of his "passion"—sincere upon every occasion, I don't doubt. He spared me, although he saw I was engaged. Perhaps it was because I 'm of no definite colour. Or he thought I was not a receptacle for "passion." And quite true,—Adder, the dear good fellow, has none. Or where should we be? On a Swiss Alp, in a châlet, he shooting chamois, and I milking cows, with *ah-ahio, ah-ahio,* all day long, and a quarrel at night over curds and whey. Well, and that 's a better old pensioner's limp to his end for "passion" than the foreign hotel bell rung mightily, and one of the two discovered with a dagger in the breast, and the other a *don't-look* lying on the pavement under the window. Yes, and that 's better than "passion" splitting and dispersing upon new adventures, from habit, with two sparks remaining of the fire.'

Aminta took Mrs. Lawrence's hands. 'Is it a lecture?'

She was kissed. 'Frothy gabble. I 'm really near to "passion" when I embrace you. You 're the only one I could run away with; live with all alone, I believe. I wonder men can see you while that silly lord of yours is absent, and not begin Morsfielding. They 're virtuous if they resist. Paggy tells the world . . . well?'

Aminta had reddened. 'What does my aunt tell the world?'

Mrs. Lawrence laid her smoothing hand absently on a frill of lace fichu above a sternly disciplined bosom at half-heave. 'I think I can judge now that you 're not much hurt by this wretched business of the presentation. The little service I could do was a moral lesson to me on

the subject of deuce-may-care antecedents. My brother Tom, too, was always playing truant, as a boy. It 's in the blood.'

She seemed to be teasing, and Aminta cried: 'My aunt! Let me hear. She tells the world——?'

'Paggy? ah, yes. Only that she says the countess has an exalted opinion of Mr. Secretary's handwriting —as witnessed by his fair copy of the Memoirs, of course.'

'Poor woman! How can she talk such foolishness! I guessed it.'

'You wear a dark red rose when you 're guessing, *ma mie*,—French for, my Aminta.'

'But consider, Isabella, Mr. Weyburn has just had the heaviest of losses. My aunt should spare mention of him.'

'Matthew Weyburn! we both like the name.' Mrs. Lawrence touched at her friend and gazed. 'I 've seen it on certain evenings—crimson over an olive sky. What it forebodes, I can't imagine; but it's the end of a lovely day. They say it threatens rain, if it begins one. It 's an ominous herald.'

'You make me,' said Aminta. 'I must redden if you keep looking at me so closely.'

'Now frown one little bit, please. I love to see you. I love to see a secret disclose itself ingenuously.'

'But what secret, my dear?' cried Aminta's defence of her innocence; and she gave a short frown.

'Have no fear. Mr. Secretary is not the man to be Morsfielding. And he can enjoy his repast; a very good sign. But is he remaining long?'

'He is going soon, I hear.'

'He 's a good boy. I could have taken to him myself, and not dreaded a worrying. There 's this difference between you and me, though, my Aminta; one of us

has the fireplace prepared for what 's-his-name—"passion." Kiss me. How could you fancy you were going to have a woman for your friend and keep hidden from her any one of the secrets that blush! and with Paggy to aid! I am sure it means very little. Admiration for good handwriting is——' a smile broke the sentence.

'You 're astray, Isabella.'

'Not I, dear, I 'm too fond of you.'

'You read what is not.'

'What is not yet written, you mean.'

'What never could be written.'

'I read what is in the blood, and comes out to me when I look. That lord of yours should take to study you as I have done ever since I fell in love with you. He 's not counselling himself well in keeping away.'

'Now you speak wisely,' said Aminta.

'Not a particle more wisely. And the reason is close at hand—see. You are young, you attract—how could it be otherwise?—and you have "passion" sleeping, and likely to wake with a spring whether roused or not. In my observation good-man t'other fellow—the poet's friend—is never long absent when the time is ripe—at least, not in places where we gather together. Well, one is a buckler against the other: I don't say with lovely Amy May,—with an honourable woman. But Aminta can smell powder and grow more mettlesome. Who can look at you and be blind to passion sleeping! The sight of you makes me dream of it—me, a woman, cool as a wine-cellar or a well. So there 's to help you to know yourself and be on your guard. I know I 'm not deceived, because I 've fallen in love with you, and no love can be without jealousy, so I have the needle in my breast, that points at any one who holds a bit of you. Kind of sympathetic needle to the magnet behind

anything. You 'll know it, if you don't now. I should have felt the thing without the aid of Paggy. So, then, imagine all my nonsense unsaid, and squeeze a drop or two of *sirop de bon conseil* out of it, as if it were your own wise meditations.' The rest of Mrs. Lawrence's discourse was a swallow's wing skimming the city stream. She departed, and Aminta was left to beat at her heart and ask whether it had a secret.

But if there was one, the secret was out, and must have another name. It had been a secret for her until she heard her friend speak those pin-points that pricked her heart, and sent the blood coursing over her face, like a betrayal, so like as to resemble a burning confession.

But if this confessed the truth, she was the insanest of women. No woman could be surer that she had her wits. She had come to see things, previously mysteries, with surprising clearness. As, for example, that passion was part of her nature; therefore her very life, lying tranced. She certainly could not love without passion: such an abandonment was the sole justification of love in a woman standing where she stood. And now for the first time she saw her exact position before the world; and she saw some way into her lord: saw that he nursed a wound, extracted balm from anything enabling him to show the world how he despised it, and undesigningly immolated her for the petty gratification.

It could not, in consequence, be the truth. To bear what she had borne she must be a passionless woman; and she was glad of her present safety in thinking it. Once it was absolutely true. She swam away to the golden-circled Island of Once; landed, and dwelt there solitarily and blissfully, looking forward to Sunday's walk round the park, looking back on it. Proudly she could tell herself that her dreams of the Prince of the Island had not been illusions as far as he was concerned;

for he had a great soul. He did not aim at a tawdry glory. He was a loss to our army—no loss to his country or the world. A woman might clasp her feeling of pride in having foreseen distinction for him; and a little, too, in distinguishing now the true individual distinction from the feathered uniform vulgar. Where the girl's dreams had proved illusions, she beheld in a title and luxuries, in a loveless marriage.

That was perilous ground. Still it taught her to see that the substantial is the dust; and passion not being active, she could reflect. After a series of penetrative flashes, flattering to her intelligence the more startling they were, reflection was exhausted. She sank on her nature's desire to join or witness agonistic incidents, shocks, wrestlings, the adventures which are brilliant air to sanguine energies. Imagination shot up, and whirled the circle of a succession of them; and she had a companion and leader, unfeatured, reverently obeyed, accepted as not to be known, not to be guessed at, in the deepest hooded inmost of her being speechlessly divined.

The sudden result of Aminta's turmoil was a determination that she must look on Steignton. And what was to be gained by that? She had no idea. And how had she stopped her imaginative flight with the thought of looking on Steignton? All she could tell was, that it would close a volume. She could not say why the volume must be closed.

Her orders for the journey down to Steignton were prompt. Mrs. Pagnell had an engagement at the house of Lady Staines for the next day to meet titles and celebrities, and it precluded her comprehension of the project. She begged to have the journey postponed. She had pledged her word, she said.

'To Mr. Morsfield?' said Aminta.

Her aunt was astounded.

'I did tell him we should be there, my dear.'

'He appears to have a pleasure in meeting you.'

'He is one of the real gentlemen of the land.'

'You correspond with him?'

'I may not be the only one.'

'Foolish aunty! How can you speak to me in that senseless way?' cried Aminta. 'You know the schemer he is, and that I have no protection from his advances unless I run the risk of bloodshed.'

'My dear Aminta, whenever I go into society, and he is present, I know I shall not be laughed at, or fall into that pit of one of their dead silences, worse for me to bear than titters and faces. It is their way of letting one feel they are of birth above us. Mr. Morsfield—purer blood than many of their highest titles—is always polite, always deferential; he helps me to feel I am not quite out of my element in the sphere I prefer. We shall be travelling alone?'

'Have you any fear?'

'Not if nothing happens. Might we not ask that Mr. Weyburn?'

'He has much work to do. He will not long be here. He is absent to-day.'

Mrs. Pagnell remarked: 'I must say he earns his money easily.'

Aminta had softened herself with the allusion to the shortness of his time with them. Her aunt's coarse hint, and the thought of his loss, and the banishment it would be to her all the way to Steignton, checked a sharp retort she could have uttered, but made it necessary to hide her eyes from sight. She went to her bedroom, and flung herself on the bed. Even so little as an unspoken defence of him shook her to floods of tears.

CHAPTER XVI

ALONG TWO ROADS TO STEIGNTON

UNACCOUNTABLE resolutions, if impromptu and springing from the female breast, are popularly taken for caprices; and even when they divert the current of a history, and all the more when they are very small matters producing a memorable crisis. In this way does a lazy world consign discussion to silence with the cynical closure. Man's hoary shrug at a whimsy sex is the reading of his enigma still.

But ask if she has the ordinary pumping heart in that riddle of a breast: and then, as the organ cannot avoid pursuit, we may get hold of it, and succeed in spelling out that she is consequent, in her fashion. She is a creature of the apparent moods and shifts and tempers only because she is kept in narrow confines, resembling, if you like, a wild cat caged. Aminta's journey down to Steignton turned the course of other fortunes besides her own; and she disdained the minor adventure it was, while dreaming it important; and she determined eagerly on going, without wanting to go; and it was neither from a sense of duty nor in a spirit of contrariety that she went. Nevertheless, with her heart in hand, her movements are traceably as rational as a soldier's before the enemy or a trader's matching his customer.

The wish to look on Steignton had been spoken or sighed for during long years between Aminta and her aunt, until finally shame and anger clinched the subject. To look on Steignton for once was now Aminta's phrasing of her sudden resolve; it appeared as a holiday relief from recent worries, and it was an expedition with

an aim, though she had but the coldest curiosity to see the place, and felt alien to it. Yet the thought, never to have seen Steignton! roused phantoms of dead wishes to drive the strange engine she was, faster than the living would have done. Her reason for haste was rationally founded on the suddenness of her resolve, which, seeing that she could not say she desired to go, seemed to come of an external admonition; and it counselled quick movements, lest her inspired obedience to the prompting should as abruptly breathe itself out. 'And in that case I shall never have seen Steignton at all,' she said, with perfect calmness, and did not attempt to sound her meaning.

She did know that she was a magazine of a great storage of powder. It banked inoffensively dry. She had forgiven her lord, owning the real nobleman he was in courtesy to women, whom his inherited ideas of them so quaintly minimized and reduced to pretty insect or tricky reptile. They, too, had the choice of being ultimately the one or the other in fact; the latter most likely.

If, however, she had forgiven her lord, the shattering of their union was the cost of forgiveness. In letting him stand high, as the lofty man she had originally worshipped, she separated herself from him, to feel that the humble *she* was of a different element, as a running water at a mountain's base. They are one in the landscape; they are far from one in reality. Aminta's pride of being chafed at the yoke of marriage.

Her aunt was directed to prepare for a start at an early hour the next morning. Mrs. Pagnell wrote at her desk, and fussed, and ordered the posting-chariot, and bewailed herself submissively; for it was the Countess of Ormont speaking when Aminta delivered commands, and the only grievance she dared to mutter was 'the

unexpectedness.' Her letters having been despatched, she was amazed in the late evening to hear Aminta give the footman orders for the chariot to be ready at the door an hour earlier than the hour previously appointed. She remonstrated. Aminta simply observed that it would cause less inconvenience to all parties. A suspicion of her aunt's proceedings was confirmed by the good woman's flustered state. She refrained from smiling.

She would have mustered courage to invite Matthew Weyburn as her escort, if he had been at hand. He was attending to his affairs with lawyers—mainly with his friend Mr. Abner. She studied map and gazetteer till late into the night. Giving her orders to the postillion on the pavement in the morning, she named a South-westerly direction out of London, and after entering the chariot, she received a case from one of the footmen.

'What is that, my dear?' said Mrs. Pagnell.

Aminta unlocked and laid it open. A pair of pistols met Mrs. Pagnell's gaze.

'We shan't be in need of those things?' the lady said anxiously.

'One never knows, on the road, aunt.'

'Loaded? You wouldn't hesitate to fire, I 'm sure.'

'At Mr. Morsfield himself, if he attempted to stop me.'

Mrs. Pagnell withdrew into her astonishment, and presently asked, in a tone of some indignation: 'Why did you mention Mr. Morsfield, Aminta?'

'Did you not write to him yesterday afternoon, aunt?'

'You read the addresses on my letters!'

'Did you not supply him with our proposed route and the time for starting?'

'Pistols!' exclaimed Mrs. Pagnell. 'One would fancy you think we are in the middle of the last century. Mr. Morsfield is a gentleman, not a highwayman.'

'He gives the impression of his being a madman.'

'The real madman is your wedded husband, Aminta, if wedding it was!'

It was too surely so, in Aminta's mind. She tried, by looking out of the window, to forget her companion. The dullness of the roads and streets opening away to flat fields combined with the postillion's unvarying jog to sicken her thoughts over the exile from London she was undergoing, and the chance that Matthew Weyburn might call at a vacant house next day, to announce his term of service to the earl, whom he had said he much wanted to see. He said it in his sharp manner when there was decision behind it. Several times after contemplating the end of her journey, and not perceiving any spot of pleasure ahead, an emotion urged her to turn back; for the young are acutely reasoning when their breasts advise them to quit a road where no pleasure beckons.

Unlike Matthew Weyburn, the tiptoe sparkle of a happy mind did not leap from her at wayside scenes, a sweep of grass, distant hills, clouds in flight. She required, since she suffered, the positive of events or blessings to kindle her glow.

Matthew Weyburn might call at the house. Would he be disappointed? He had preserved her letters of the old school-days. She had burnt his. But she had not burnt the letters of Mr. Morsfield; and she cared nothing for that man. Assuredly she merited the stigma branding women as crack-brained. Yet she was not one of the fools; she could govern a household, and she liked work, she had the capacity for devotedness. So, therefore, she was a woman perverted by her position,

and she shook her bonds in revolt from marriage. Imagining a fall down some suddenly spied chasm of her nature, she had a sisterly feeling for the women named sinful. At the same time, reflecting that they are sinful only with the sinful, she knelt thankfully at the feet of the man who had saved her from such danger. Tears threatened. They were a poor atonement for the burning of his younger letters. But not he—she was the sufferer, and she whipped up a sensation of wincing at the flames they fell to, and at their void of existence, committing sentimental idiocies worthy of a lovesick girl, consciously to escape the ominous thought, which her woman's perception had sown in her, that he too chafed at a marriage no marriage: was true in fidelity, not true through infidelity, as she had come to be. The thought implied misery for both. She entered a black desolation, with the prayer that he might not be involved, for his own sake: partly also on behalf of the sustaining picture the young schoolmaster at his task, merry among his dear boys, to trim and point them body and mind for their business in the world, painted for her a weariful prospect of the life she must henceforth drag along.

Is a woman of the plain wits common to numbers ever deceived in her perception of a man's feelings for her? Let her first question herself whether she respects him. If she does not, her judgement will go easily astray, intuition and observation are equally at fault, she has no key; he has charmed her blood, that is all. But if she respects him, she cannot be deceived; respect is her embrace of a man's character. Aminta's vision was clear. She had therefore to juggle with the fact revealed, that she might keep her heart from rushing out; and the process was a disintegration of her feminine principle of docility under the world's decrees. At each pause of her mental activity she was hurled against

the state of marriage. Compassion for her blameless fellow in misery brought a deluge to sweep away all institutions and landmarks.

But supposing the blest worst to happen, what exchange had she to bestow? Her beauty? She was reputed beautiful. It had made a madman of one man; and in her poverty of endowments to be generous with, she hovered over Mr. Morsfield like a cruel vampire, for the certification that she had a much-prized gift to bestow upon his rival.

But supposing it: she would then be no longer in the shiny garden of the flowers of wealth; and how little does beauty weigh as an aid to an active worker in the serious fighting world! She would be a kind of potted rose-tree under his arm, of which he must eventually tire.

A very cold moment came, when it seemed that even the above supposition, in the case of a woman who has been married, is shameful to her, a sin against her lover, and should be obliterated under floods of scarlet. For, if she has pride, she withers to think of pushing the most noble of men upon his generosity. And, further, if he is not delicately scrupulous, is there not something wanting in him? The very cold wave passed, leaving the sentence: better dream of being plain friends.

Mrs. Pagnell had been quietly chewing her cud of the sullens, as was the way with her after a snub. She now resumed her gossip of the naughty world she knelt to and expected to see some day stricken by a bolt from overhead; containing, as it did, such wicked members as that really indefensible brazen Mrs. Amy May, who was only the daughter of a half-pay naval captain, and that Marquis of Colleston, who would, they say, decorate her with his title to-morrow, if her husband were but somewhere else. She spread all sorts of reports

about Mr. Morsfield, and he was honour itself in his reserve about her. 'Depend upon it, Aminta—he was not more than a boy then, and they say she aimed at her enfranchisement by plotting the collision, for his Yorkshire revenues are immense, and he is, you know, skilful in the use of arms, and Captain May has no resources whatever: penury! no one cares to speculate how they contrive!—but while that dreadful duelling—and my lord as bad as any in his day—exists, depend upon it, an unscrupulous good-looking woman has as many lives for her look of an eye or lift of a finger as a throned Ottoman Turk on his divan.'

Aminta wished to dream. She gave her aunt a second dose, and the lady relapsed again.

Power to dream had gone. She set herself to look at roadside things, cottage gardens, old housewives in doorways, gaffer goodman meeting his crony on the path, groups of boys and girls. She would take the girls, Matthew Weyburn the boys. She had lessons to give to girls, she had sympathy, pity, anticipation. That would be a life of happy service. It might be a fruitful trial of the system he proposed, to keep the boys and girls in company as much as possible, both at lessons and at games. His was the larger view. Her lord's view appeared similar to that of her aunt's 'throned Ottoman Turk on his divan.' Matthew Weyburn believed in the bettering of the world; Lord Ormont had no belief like it.

Presently Mrs. Pagnell returned to the charge, and once more she was nipped, and irritated to declare she had never known her niece's temper so provoking. Aminta was launching a dream of a lass she had seen in a field, near a white hawthorn, standing upright, her left arm aloft round the pole of a rake, the rim of her bonnet tipped on her forehead; an attitude of a rustic

Britannia with helmet heeling at dignity. The girl's eyes hung to the passing chariot, without movement of her head. It was Aminta who looked back, and she saw the girl looking away. Among the superior dames and damsels she had seen, there was not one to match that figure for stately air, gallant ease, and splendour of pose. Matthew Weyburn would have admired the girl. Aminta did better than envy, she cast off the last vestiges of her bitter ambition to be a fine lady, and winged into the bosom of the girl, and not shyly said 'yes' to Matthew Weyburn, and to herself, deep in herself: 'A maid has no need to be shy.' Hardly blushing, she walks on into the new life beside him, and hears him say: 'I in my way, you in yours; we are equals, the stronger for being equals,' and she quite agrees, and she gives him the fuller heart for his not requiring her to be absorbed—she is the braver mate for him. Does not that read his meaning? Happiest of the girls of earth, she has divined it at once, from never having had the bitter ambition to be a slave, that she might wear rich tissues; and let herself be fettered, that she might loll in idleness; lose a soul to win a title; escape commonplace to discover it ghastlier under cloth of gold, and the animal crowned, adored, fattened, utterly served, in the class called by consent of human society the Upper.

Reason whispered a reminder of facts to her.

'But I am not the Countess of Ormont!' she said. She felt herself the girl, her sensations were so intensely simple.

Proceeding to an argument, that the earl did not regard her as the Countess of Ormont, or the ceremony at the British Embassy as one serious and binding, she pushed her reason too far: sweet delusion waned. She waited for some fresh scene to revive it.

Aminta sat unwittingly weaving her destiny.

While she was thus engaged, a carriage was rolling on the more westerly road down to Steignton. Seated in it were Lady Charlotte Eglett and Matthew Weyburn. They had met at Arthur Abner's office the previous day. She went there straight from Lord Ormont's house-agent and upholsterer, to have a queer bit of thunderous news confirmed, that her brother was down at Steignton, refurnishing the house, and not for letting. She was excited: she treated Arthur Abner's closed-volume reticence as a corroboration of the house-agent's report, and hearing Weyburn speak of his anxiety to see the earl immediately, in order to get release from his duties, proposed a seat in her carriage; for down Steignton way she meant to go, if only as excuse for a view of the old place. She kept asking what Lord Ormont wanted down at Steignton refurnishing the house, and not to let it! Her evasions of answers that plain speculation would supply were quaint. 'He hasn't my feeling for Steignton. He could let it—I couldn't. Sacrilege to me to have a tenant in my old home where I was born. He 's furnishing to raise his rent. His country won't give him anything to do, so he turns miser. That 's my brother Rowsley's way of taking on old age.'

Her brother Rowsley might also be showing another sign of his calamitous condition. She said to Weyburn, in the carriage, that her brother Rowsley might like having his hair clipped by the Philistine woman; which is one of the ways of strong men to confess themselves ageing. 'Not,' said she, with her usual keen justness, 'not that I 've a word against Delilah. I look upon her as a patriot; she dallied and she used the scissors on behalf of her people. She wasn't bound to Samson in honour,—liked a strong man, probably enough. She

proved she liked her country better. The Jews wrote the story of it, so there she stands for posterity to pelt her, poor wretch.'

'A tolerably good analogy for the story of men and women generally,' said Weyburn.

'Ah, well, you 've a right to talk; you don't run miauling about women. It 's easy to be squashy on that subject. As for the Jews, I don't go by their history, but now they 're down I don't side with the Philistines, or Christians. They 're good citizens, and they 've got Samson in the brain, too. That comes of persecution, a hard education. They beat the world by counting in the head. That 's because they 've learnt the value of fractions. Napoleon knew it in war, when he looked to the boots and great-coats of his men; those were his fractions. Lord Ormont thinks he had too hard-and-fast a system for the battle-field.'

'A greater strategist than tactician, my lady? It may be,' said Weyburn, smiling at her skips.

'Massing his cannon to make a big hole for his cavalry, my brother says; and weeding his infantry for the Imperial Guard he postponed the moment to use.'

'At Moskowa?'

'Waterloo. I believe Lord Ormont would—there! his country 's lost him, and chose it. They 'll have their day for repentance yet. What a rapture to have a thousand horsemen following you! I suppose there never was a man worthy of the name who roared to be a woman. I know I could have shrieked half my life through to have been born male. It 's no matter now. When we come to this hateful old age, we meet: no, we 're no sex then—we 're dry sticks. I 'll tell you: my Olmer doctor——that 's an impudent fellow who rode by staring into my carriage. The

window 's down. He could see without pushing his hat in.'

Weyburn looked out after a man cantering on.

'A Mr. Morsfield,' he said. 'I thought it was he when I saw him go by. I 've met him at the fencing-rooms. He 's one of the violent fencers, good for making his point, if one funks an attack.'

'That man Morsfield, is it? I wonder what he 's doing on the road here. He goes over London boasting —hum, nothing to me. But he 'll find Lord Ormont's arm can protect a poor woman, whatever she is. He 'd have had it before, only Lord Ormont shuns a scandal. I was telling you, my Olmer doctor forbade horse-riding, and my husband raised a noise like one of my turkey-cocks on the wing; so I 've given up the saddle, to quiet him. I guessed. I went yesterday morning to my London physician. He sounded me, pushed out his mouth and pulled down his nose, recommended avoidance of excitement. "Is it heart?" I said. He said it was heart. That was the best thing an old woman could hear. He said, when he saw I wasn't afraid, it was likely to be quick; no doctors, no nurses and daily bulletins for inquirers, but just the whites of the eyes, the laying-out, the undertaker, and the family-vault. That 's one reason why I want to see Steignton before the blow that may fall any day, whether my brother Rowsley 's there or no. But that Olmer doctor of mine, Causitt, Peter Causitt, shall pay me for being a liar or else an ignoramus when I told him he was to tell me bluntly the nature of my disease.'

A horseman, in whom they recognized Mr. Morsfield, passed, clattering on the road behind them.

'Some woman here about,' Lady Charlotte muttered.

Weyburn saw him joined by a cavalier, and the two consulted and pointed whips right and left.

CHAPTER XVII

LADY CHARLOTTE'S TRIUMPH

One of the days of sovereign splendour in England was riding down the heavens, and drawing the royal mantle of the gold-fringed shadows over plain and wavy turf, blue water and woods of the country round Steignton. A white mansion shone to a length of oblong lake that held the sun-ball suffused in mild yellow.

'There 's the place,' Lady Charlotte said to Weyburn, as they had view of it at a turn of the park. She said to herself—where I was born and bred! and her sight gloated momentarily on the house and side avenues, a great plane standing to the right of the house, the sparkle of a little river running near; all the scenes she knew, all young and lively. She sprang on her seat for a horse beneath her, and said, 'But this is healthy excitement,' as in reply to her London physician's remonstrances. 'And there 's my brother Rowsley, talking to one of the keepers,' she cried. 'You see Lord Ormont? I can see a mile. Sight doesn't fail with me. He 's insisting. 'Ware poachers when Rowsley 's on his ground! You smell the air here? Nobody dies round about Steignton. Their legs wear out and they lie down to rest them. It 's the finest air in the world. Now look, the third window left of the porch, first floor. That was my room before I married. Strangers have been here and called the place home. It can never be home to any but me and Rowsley. He sees the carriage. He little thinks! He 's dressed in his white corduroy and knee-breeches. Age! he won't know age till he 's ninety.

Here he comes marching. He can't bear surprises. I 'll wave my hand and call.'

She called his name.

In a few strides he was at the carriage window. 'You, Charlotte?'

'Home again, Rowsley! Bring down your eyebrows, and let me hear you 're glad I 've come.'

'What made you expect you would find me here?'

'Anything—cats on the tiles at night. You can't keep a secret from me. Here 's Mr. Weyburn, good enough to be my escort. I 'll get out.'

She alighted, scorning help; Weyburn at her heels.

The earl nodded to him politely and not cordially. He was hardly cordial to Lady Charlotte.

That had no effect on her. 'A glorious day for Steignton,' she said. 'Ah, there 's the Buridon group of beeches; grander trees than grow at Buridon. Old timber now. I knew them slim as demoiselles. Where 's the ash? We had a splendid ash on the west side.'

'Dead and cut down long since,' replied the earl.

'So we go!'

She bent her steps to the spot; a grass-covered heave of the soil.

'Dear old tree!' she said, in a music of elegy: and to Weyburn: 'Looks like a stump of an arm lopped off a shoulder in bandages. Nature does it so. All the tenants doing well, Rowsley?'

'About the same amount of trouble with them.'

'Ours at Olmer get worse.'

'It 's a process for the extirpation of the landlords.'

'Then down goes the country.'

'They 've got their case, their papers tell us.'

'I know they have; but we 've got the soil, and we 'll make a fight of it.'

'They can fight too, they say.'

'I should be sorry to think they couldn't if they 're Englishmen.'

She spoke so like his old Charlotte of the younger days that her brother partly laughed.

'Parliamentary fighting 's not much to your taste or mine. They 've lost their stomach for any other. The battle they enjoy is the battle that goes for the majority. Gauge their valour by that.'

'To be sure,' said his responsive sister. She changed her note. 'But what I say is, let the nobles keep together and stick to their class. There 's nothing to fear then. They must marry among themselves, think of the blood: it 's their first duty. Or better a peasant girl! Middle courses dilute it to the stuff in a publican's tankard. It 's an adulterous beast who thinks of mixing old wine with anything.'

'Hulloa!' said the earl; and she drew up.

'You 'll have me here till over to-morrow, Rowsley, so that I may have one clear day at Steignton?'

He bowed. 'You will choose your room. Mr. Weyburn is welcome.'

Weyburn stated the purport of his visit, and was allowed to name an early day for the end of his term of service.

Entering the house, Lady Charlotte glanced at the armour and stag-branches decorating corners of the hall, and straightway laid her head forward, pushing after it in the direction of the drawing-room. She went in, stood for a minute, and came out. Her mouth was hard shut.

At dinner she had tales of uxorious men, of men who married mistresses, of the fearful incubus the vulgar family of a woman of the inferior classes ever must be; and her animadversions were strong in the matter of gew-gaw modern furniture. The earl submitted to hear.

She was, however, keenly attentive whenever he proffered any item of information touching Steignton.

After dinner Weyburn strolled to the points of view she cited as excellent for different aspects of her old home.

He found her waiting to hear his laudation when he came back; and in the early morning she was on the terrace, impatient to lead him down to the lake. There, at the boat-house, she commanded him to loosen a skiff and give her a paddle. Between exclamations, designed to waken louder from him, and not so successful as her cormorant hunger for praise of Steignton required, she plied him to confirm with his opinion an opinion that her reasoning mind had almost formed in the close neighbourhood of the beloved and honoured person providing it; for abstract ideas were unknown to her. She put it, however, as in the abstract:—

'How is it we meet people brave as lions before an enemy, and rank cowards where there 's a botheration among their friends at home? And tell me, too, if you 've thought the thing over, what 's the meaning of this? I 've met men in high places, and they 've risen to distinction by their own efforts, and they head the nation. Right enough, you 'd say. Well, I talk with them, and I find they 've left their brains on the ladder that led them up; they 've only the ideas of their grandfather on general subjects. I come across a common peasant or craftsman, and he down there has a mind more open—he 's wiser in his intelligence than his rulers and lawgivers up above him. He understands what I say, and I learn from him. I don't learn much from our senators, or great lawyers, great doctors, professors, members of governing bodies—that lot. Policy seems to petrify their minds when they 've got on an eminence. Now explain it, if you can.'

'Responsibility has a certain effect on them, no doubt,' said Weyburn. 'Eminent station among men doesn't give a larger outlook. Most of them confine their observation to their supports. It happens to be one of the questions I have thought over. Here in England, and particularly on a fortnight's run in the lowlands of Scotland once, I have, like you, my lady, come now and then across the people we call common, men and women, old wayside men especially; slow-minded, but hard in their grasp of facts, and ready to learn, and logical, large in their ideas, though going a roundabout way to express them. They were at the bottom of wisdom, for they had in their heads the delicate sense of justice, upon which wisdom is founded. That is what their rulers lack. Unless we have the sense of justice abroad like a common air, there 's no peace, and no steady advance. But these humble people had it. They reasoned from it, and came to sound conclusions. I felt them to be my superiors. On the other hand, I have not felt the same with "our senators, rulers, and lawgivers." They are for the most part deficient in the liberal mind.'

'Ha! good, so far. How do you account for it?' said Lady Charlotte.

'I read it in this way: that the world being such as it is at present, demanding and rewarding with honours and pay special services, the men called great, who have risen to distinction, are not men of brains, but the men of aptitudes. These men of aptitudes have a poor conception of the facts of life to meet the necessities of modern expansion. They are serviceable in departments. They go as they are driven, or they resist. In either case, they explain how it is that we have a world moving so sluggishly. They are not the men of brains, the men of insight and outlook. Often enough they are foes of the men of brains.'

'Aptitudes; yes, that flashes a light into me,' said Lady Charlotte. 'I see it better. It helps to some comprehension of their muddle. A man may be a first-rate soldier, doctor, banker—as we call the usurer now-a-days—or brewer, orator, anything that leads up to a figure-head, and prove a foolish fellow if you sound him. I 've thought something like it, but wanted the word. They say themselves, "Get to know, and you see with what little wisdom the world is governed!" You explain how it is. I shall carry "aptitudes" away.'

She looked straight at Weyburn. 'If I were a younger woman I could kiss you for it.'

He bowed to her very gratefully.

'Remember, my lady, there 's a good deal of the Reformer in that definition.'

'I stick to my class. But they shall hear a true word when there 's one abroad, I can tell them. That reminds me—you ought to have asked; let me tell you I 'm friendly with the Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey. We had a wrestle for half an hour, and I threw him and helped him up, and he apologized for tumbling, and I subscribed to one of his charities, and gave up about the pew, but had an excuse for not sitting under the sermon. A poor good creature. He 's got the aptitudes for his office. He won't do much to save his Church. I knew another who had his aptitude for the classics, and he has mounted. He was my tutor when I was a girl. He was fond of declaiming passages from Lucian and Longus and Ovid. One day he was at it with a piece out of Daphnis and Chloe, and I said, "Now translate." He fetched a gurgle to say he couldn't, and I slapped his cheek. Will you believe it? the man was indignant. I told him, if he would like to know why I behaved in "that unmaidenly way," he had better apply at home. I had no further intimations of his classical aptitudes; but he took me

for a cleverer pupil than I was. I hadn't a notion of the stuff he recited. I read by his face. That was my aptitude—always has been. But think of the donkeys parents are when they let a man have a chance of pouring his barley-sugar and sulphur into the ears of a girl. Lots of girls have no latent heckles and prickles to match his villany.—There 's my brother come back to breakfast from a round. You and I 'll have a drive before lunch, and a ride or a stroll in the afternoon. There 's a lot to see. I mean you to get the whole place into your head. I 've ordered the phaeton, and you shall take the whip, with me beside you. That 's how my husband and I spent three-quarters of our honeymoon.'

Each of the three breakfasted alone.

They met on the terrace. It was easily perceived that Lord Ormont stood expecting an assault at any instant; prepared also to encounter and do battle with his redoubtable sister. Only he wished to defer the engagement. And he was magnanimous: he was in the right, she in the wrong; he had no desire to grapple with her, fling and humiliate. The Sphinx of Mrs. Pagnell had been communing with himself unwontedly during the recent weeks.

What was the riddle of him? That, he did not read. But, expecting an assault, and relieved by his sister Charlotte's departure with Weyburn, he went to the drawing-room, where he had seen her sniff her strong suspicions of a lady coming to throne it. Charlotte could believe that he flouted the world with a beautiful young woman on his arm; she would not believe him capable of doing that in his family home and native county; so, then, her shrewd wits had nothing or little to learn. But her vehement fighting against facts; her obstinate aristocratic prejudices, which he shared; her stinger of a tongue: these in ebullition formed a

discomforting prospect. The battle might as well be conducted through the post. Come it must!

Even her writing of the pointed truths she would deliver was an unpleasant anticipation. His ears heated. Undoubtedly he could crush her. Yet, supposing her to speak to his ears, she would say: 'You married a young woman, and have been foiling and fooling her ever since, giving her half a title to the name of wife, and allowing her in consequence to be wholly disfigured before the world—your family naturally her chief enemies, who would otherwise (Charlotte would proclaim it) have been her friends. What! your intention was (one could hear Charlotte's voice) to smack the world in the face, and you smacked your young wife's instead!'

His intention had been nothing of the sort. He had married, in a foreign city, a young woman who adored him, whose features, manners, and carriage of her person satisfied his exacting taste in the sex; and he had intended to cast gossipy England over the rail and be a traveller for the remainder of his days. And at the first she had acquiesced, tacitly accepted it as part of the contract. He bore with the burden of an intolerable aunt of hers for her sake. The two fell to work to conspire. Aminta 'tired of travelling,' Aminta must have a London house. She continually expressed a hope that 'she might set her eyes on Steignton some early day.' In fact, she as good as confessed her scheme to plot for the acknowledged position of Countess of Ormont in the English social world. That was a distinct breach of the contract.

As to the babble of the London world about a 'very young wife,' he scorned it completely, but it belonged to the calculation. 'A very handsome young wife,' would lay commands on a sexagenarian vigilance while adding to his physical glory. The latter he could forego

among a people he despised. It would, however, be an annoyance to stand constantly hand upon sword-hilt.

There was, besides, the conflict with his redoubtable sister. He had no dread of it, in contemplation of the necessity; he could crush his Charlotte. The objection was, that his Aminta should be pressing him to do it.

Examine the situation at present. Aminta has all she needs—every luxury. Her title as Countess of Ormont is not denied. Her husband justly refuses to put foot into English society. She, choosing to go where she may be received, dissociates herself from him, and he does not complain. She does complain. There is a difference between the two.

He had always shunned the closer yoke with a woman because of these vexatious dissensions. For not only are women incapable of practising, they cannot comprehend magnanimity.

Lord Ormont's argumentative reverie to the above effect had been pursued over and over. He knew that the country which broke his military career and ridiculed his newspaper controversy was unforgiven by him. He did not reflect on the consequences of such an unpardoning spirit in its operation on his mind.

If he could but have passed the injury, he would ultimately—for his claims of service were admitted—have had employment of some kind. Inoccupation was poison to him; travel juggled with his malady of restlessness; really, a compression of the warrior's natural forces. His Aminta, pushed to it by the woman Pagnell, declined to help him in softening the virulence of the disease. She would not travel; she would fix in this London of theirs, and scheme to be hailed the accepted Countess of Ormont. She manœuvred; she threw him on the veteran soldier's instinct, and it resulted spontaneously that he manœuvred.

Hence their game of Pull, which occupied him a little, tickled him and amused. The watching of her pretty infantile tactics amused him too much to permit of a sidethought on the cruelty of the part he played. She had every luxury, more than her station by right of birth would have supplied.

But he was astonished to find that his Aminta proved herself clever, though she had now and then said something pointed. She was in awe of him; notwithstanding which, clearly she meant to win and pull him over. He did not dislike her for it; she might use her weapons to play her game; and that she should bewitch men—a man like Morsfield—was not wonderful. On the other hand, her conquest of Mrs. Lawrence Finchley scored tellingly: that was unaccountably queer. What did Mrs. Lawrence expect to gain? the sage lord asked. He had not known women devoid of a positive practical object of their own when they bestirred themselves to do a friendly deed.

Thanks to her conquest of Mrs. Lawrence, his Aminta was gaining ground—daily she made an advance; insomuch that he had heard of himself as harshly blamed in London for not having countenanced her recent and rather imprudent move. In other words, whenever she gave a violent tug at their game of Pull, he was expected to second it. But the world of these English is too monstrously stupid in what it expects, for any of its extravagances to be followed by interjections.

All the while he was trimming and rolling a field of armistice at Steignton, where they could discuss the terms he had a right to dictate, having yielded so far. Would she be satisfied with the rule of his ancestral hall, and the dispensing of hospitalities to the county? No, one may guess: no woman is ever satisfied. But she would have to relinquish her game, counting her

good round half of the honours. Somewhat more, on the whole. Without beating, she certainly had accomplished the miracle of bending him. To time and a wife it is no disgrace for a man to bend. It is the form of submission of the bulrush to the wind, of courtesy in the cavalier to a lady.

'Oh, here you are, Rowsley,' Lady Charlotte exclaimed at the drawing-room door. 'Well, and I don't like those Louis Quinze cabinets; and that modern French mantelpiece clock is hideous. You seem to furnish in downright contempt of the women you invite to sit in the room. Lord help the wretched woman playing hostess in such a pinchbeck bric-à-brac shop, if there were one! She 's spared, at all events.'

He stepped at slow march to one of the five windows. Lady Charlotte went to another near by. She called to Weyburn—

'We had a regatta on that water when Lord Ormont came of age. I took an oar in one of the boats, and we won a prize; and when I was landing I didn't stride enough to the spring-plank, and plumped in.'

Some labourers of the estate passed in front.

Lord Ormont gave out a broken laugh. 'See those fellows walk! That 's the raw material of the famous English infantry. They bend their knees five-and-forty degrees for every stride; and when you drill them out of that, they 're stiff as ramrods. I gymnasticized them in my regiment. I 'd have challenged any French regiment to out-walk or out-jump us, or any crack Tyrolese Jägers to out-climb, though we were cavalry.'

'Yes, my lord, and exercised crack corps are wanted with us,' Weyburn replied. 'The English authorities are adverse to it, but it 's against nature—on the supposition that all Englishmen might enrol untrained in Cæsar's pet legion. Virgil shows knowledge of men when

he says of the row-boat straining in emulation, *Possunt quia posse videntur.*'

He talked on rapidly; he wondered that he did not hear Lady Charlotte exclaim at what she must be seeing.

From the nearest avenue a lady had issued. She stood gazing at the house, erect—a gallant figure of a woman —one hand holding her parasol, the other at her hip. He knew her. She was a few paces ahead of Mrs. Pagnell, beside whom a gentleman walked.

The cry came: 'It 's that man Morsfield! Who brings that man Morsfield here? He hunted me on the road; he seemed to be on the wrong scent. Who are those women? Rowsley, are your grounds open every day of the week? She threatens to come in!'

Lady Charlotte had noted that the foremost and younger of 'those women' understood how to walk and how to dress to her shape and colour. She inclined to think she was having to do with an intrepid foreign-bred minx.

Aminta had been addressed by one of her companions, and had hastened forward. It looked like the beginning of a run to enter the house.

Mrs. Pagnell ran after her. She ran cow-like.

The earl's gorge rose at the spectacle Charlotte was observing.

With Morsfield he could have settled accounts at any moment, despatching Aminta to her chamber for an hour. He had, though he was offended, an honourable guess that she had not of her free will travelled with the man and brought him into the grounds. It was the presence of the intolerable Pagnell under Charlotte's eyes which irritated him beyond the common anger he felt at Aminta's pursuit of him right into Steignton. His mouth locked. Lady Charlotte needed no speech from him for sign of the boiling; she was too wary to speak while that went on.

He said to Weyburn, loud enough for his Charlotte to hear. 'Do me the favour to go to the Countess of Ormont. Conduct her back to London. You will say it is my command. Inform Mr. Morsfield, with my compliments, I regret I have no weapons here. I understand him to complain of having to wait. I shall be in town three days from this date.'

'My lord,' said Mr. Weyburn; and actually he did mean to supplicate. He could imagine seeing Lord Ormont's eyebrows rising to alpine heights.

Lady Charlotte seized his arm.

'Go at once. Do as you are told. I 'll have your portmanteau packed and sent after you—the phaeton's out in the yard—to Rowsley, or Ashead, or Dornton, wherever they put up. Now go, or we shall have hot work. Keep your head on, and go.'

He went, without bowing.

Lady Charlotte rang for the footman.

The earl and she watched the scene on the sward below the terrace.

Aminta listened to Weyburn. Evidently there was no expostulation.

But it was otherwise with Mrs. Pagnell. She flung wild arms of a semaphore signalling national events. She sprang before Aminta to stop her retreat, and stamped and gibbed, for sign that she would not be driven. She fell away to Mr. Morsfield, for simple hearing of her plaint. He appeared emphatic. There was a passage between him and Weyburn.

'I suspect you 've more than your match in young Weyburn, Mr. Morsfield,' Lady Charlotte said, measuring them as they stood together. They turned at last.

'You shall drive back to town with me, Rowsley,' said the fighting dame.

She breathed no hint of her triumph.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SCENE ON THE ROAD BACK

After refusing to quit the grounds of Steignton, in spite of the proprietor, Mrs. Pagnell burst into an agitation to have them be at speed, that they might 'shake the dust of the place from the soles of their feet'; and she hurried past Aminta and Lord Ormont's insolent emissary, carrying Mr. Morsfield beside her, perforce of a series of imperiously-toned vacuous questions, to which he listened in rigid politeness, with the ejaculation steaming off from time to time, 'A scandal!'

He shot glances behind him.

Mrs. Pagnell was going too fast. She, however, would not hear of a halt, and she was his main apology for being present; he was excruciatingly attached to the horrid woman.

Weyburn spoke the commonplaces about regrets to Aminta.

'Believe me, it 's long since I have been so happy,' she said.

She had come out of her stupefaction, and she wore no theatrical looks of cheerfulness.

'I regret that you should be dragged away. But, if you say you do not mind, it will be pleasant to me. I can excuse Lord Ormont's anger. I was ignorant of his presence here. I thought him in Paris. I supposed the place empty. I wished to see it once. I travelled as the niece of Mrs. Pagnell. She is a little infatuated. . . . Mr. Morsfield heard of our expedition through her. I changed the route. I was not in want of a defender. I could have defended myself in case of need. We slept

at Ashead, two hours from Steignton. He and a friend accompanied us, not with my consent. Lord Ormont could not have been aware of that. These accidental circumstances happen. There may be pardonable intentions on all sides.'

She smiled. Her looks were open, and her voice light and spirited; though the natural dark rose-glow was absent from her olive cheeks.

Weyburn puzzled over the mystery of so volatile a treatment of a serious matter, on the part of a woman whose feelings he had reason to know were quick and deep. She might be acting, as women so cleverly do.

It could hardly be acting when she pointed to peeps of scenery, with a just eye for landscape.

'You leave us for Switzerland very soon?' she said.

'The Reversion I have been expecting has fallen in, besides my inheritance. My mother was not to see the school. But I shall not forget her counsels. I can now make my purchase of the house and buildings, and buy out my partner at the end of a year. My boys are jumping to start. I had last week a letter from Emile.'

'Dear little Emile!'

'You like him?'

'I could use a warmer word. He knew me when I was a girl.'

She wound the strings of his heart suddenly tense, and they sang to their quivering.

'You will let me hear of you, Mr. Weyburn?'

'I will write. Oh! certainly I will write, if I am told you are interested in our doings, Lady Ormont.'

'I will let you know that I am.'

'I shall be happy in writing full reports.'

'Every detail, I beg. All concerning the school. Help me to feel I am a boarder. I catch up an old sympathy I had for girls and boys. For boys! any

boys! the dear monkey boys! cherub monkeys! They are so funny. I am sure I never have laughed as I did at Selina Collett's report, through her brother, of the way the boys tried to take to my name; and their sneezing at it, like a cat at a deceitful dish. "Aminta" —was that their way?'

'Something—the young rascals!'

'But please repeat it as you heard them.'

"'Aminta.'"

He subdued the mouthing.

'It didn't offend me at all. It is one of my amusements to think of it. But after a time they liked the name; and then how did they say it?'

He had the beloved Aminta on his lips.

He checked it, or the power to speak it failed.

She drew in a sharp breath.

'I hope your boys will have plenty of fun in them. They will have you for a providence and a friend. I should wish to propose to visit your school some day. You will keep me informed whether the school has vacancies. You will, please, keep me regularly informed?'

She broke into sobs.

Weyburn talked on of the school, for a cover to the resuming of her fallen mask, as he fancied it.

She soon recovered, all save a steady voice for converse, and begged him to proceed, and spoke in the flow of the subject; but the quaver of her tones was a cause of further melting. The tears poured, she could not explain why, beyond assuring him that they were no sign of unhappiness. Winds on the great waters against a strong tidal current beat up the wave and shear and wing the spray, as in Aminta's bosom. Only she could know that it was not her heart weeping, though she had grounds for a woman's weeping. But she alone

could be aware of her heart's running counter to the tears.

Her agitation was untimely. Both Mrs. Pagnell and Mr. Morsfield observed emotion at work. And who could wonder? A wife denied the admittance to her husband's house by her husband! The most beautiful woman of her time relentlessly humiliated, ordered to journey back the way she had come.

They had reached the gate of the park, and had turned.

'A scandal!'

Mr. Morsfield renewed his interjection vehemently, for an apology to his politeness in breaking from Mrs. Pagnell.

Joining the lady, whose tears were of the nerves, he made offer of his devotion in any shape; and she was again in the plight to which a desperado can push a woman of the gentle kind. She had the fear of provoking a collision if she reminded him, that despite her entreaties, he had compelled her, seconded by her aunt as he had been, to submit to his absurd protection on the walk across the park.

He seemed quite regardless of the mischief he had created; and, reflecting upon how it served his purpose, he might well be. Intemperate lover, of the ancient pattern, that he was, his aim to win the woman acknowledged no obstacle in the means. Her pitiable position appealed to the best of him; his inordinate desire of her aroused the worst. It was, besides, an element of his coxcombry, that he should, in apeing the utterly inconsiderate, rush swiftly to impersonate it when his passions were cast on a die.

Weyburn he ignored as a stranger, an intruder, an inferior.

Aminta's chariot was at the gate.

She had to resign herself to the chances of a clash of

men, and, as there were two to one, she requested help of Weyburn's hand, that he might be near her.

A mounted gentleman, smelling parasite in his bearing, held the bridle of Morsfield's horse.

The ladies having entered the chariot, Morsfield sprang to the saddle, and said: 'You, sir, had better stretch your legs to the inn.'

'There is room for you, Mr. Weyburn,' said Aminta.

Mrs. Pagnell puffed.

'I can't think we 've room, my dear. I want that bit of seat in front for my feet.'

Morsfield kicked at his horse's flanks, and between Weyburn and the chariot step, cried: 'Back, sir!'

His reins were seized, the horse reared, the unexpected occurred.

Weyburn shouted 'Off!' to the postillion, and jumped in.

Morsfield was left to the shaking of a dusty coat, while the chariot rolled its gentle course down the leafy lane into the high-road.

His friend had seized the horse's bridle-reins; and he remarked: 'I say, Dolf, we don't prosper to-day.'

'He pays for it!' said Morsfield, foot in stirrup. 'You 'll take him and trounce him at the inn. I don't fight with servants. Better game. One thing, Cumnock: the fellow 's clever at the foils.'

'Foils to the devil! If I tackle the fellow, it won't be with the buttons. But how has he pushed in?'

Morsfield reported 'the scandal!' in sharp headings.

'Turned her away. Won't have her enter his house —grandest woman in all England! Sent his dog to guard. Think of it for an insult! It 's insult upon insult. I 've done my utmost to fire his marrow. I did myself a good turn by following her up and entering that park with her. I shall succeed; there 's a look of it.

All I have—my life—is that woman's. I never knew what this devil's torture was before I saw her.'

His friend was concerned for his veracity.

'Amy!'

'A common spotted snake. She caught me young, and she didn't carry me off, as I mean to carry off this glory of her sex—she is: you've seen her!—and free her, and devote every minute of the rest of my days to her. I say I must win the woman if I stop at nothing, or I perish; and if it's a failure, exit's my road. I've watched every atom she touched in a room, and would have heaped gold to have the chairs, tables, cups, carpets, mine. I have two short letters written with her hand. I'd give two of my estates for two more. If I were a beggar, and kept them, I should be rich. Relieve me of that dog, and I toss you a thousand-pound note, and thank you from my soul, Cumnock. You know what hangs on it. Spur, you dolt, or she'll be out of sight.'

They cantered upon application of the spur. Captain Cumnock was an impecunious fearless rascal, therefore a parasite and a bully duellist; a thick-built north-countryman; a burly ape of the ultra-elegant; hunter, gamester, hard-drinker, man of pleasure. His known readiness to fight was his trump-card at a period when the declining custom of the duel taxed men's courage to brave the law and the Puritan in the interests of a privileged and menaced aristocracy. An incident like the present was the passion in the dice-box to Cumnock. Morsfield was of the order of men who can be generous up to the pitch of their desires. Consequently, the world accounted him open-handed and devoted when enamoured. Few men liked him; he was a hero with some women. The women he trampled on; the men he despised. To the lady of his choice he sincerely

offered his fortune and his life for the enjoyment of her favour. His ostentation and his offensive daring combined the characteristics of the peacock and the hawk. Always near upon madness, there were occasions when he could eclipse the insane. He had a ringing renown in his class.

Chariot and horsemen arrived at the Roebuck Arms, at the centre of the small town of Ashead, on the line from Steignton through Rowsley. The pair of cavaliers dismounted and hustled Weyburn in assisting the ladies to descend.

The ladies entered the inn; they declined refection of any sort. They had biscuits and sweetmeats, and looked forward to tea at a farther stage. Captain Cumnock stooped to their verdict on themselves, with marvel at the quantity of flesh they managed to put on their bones from such dieting.

'By your courtesy, sir, a word with you in the inn-yard, if you please,' he said to Weyburn in the inn-porch.

Weyburn answered, 'Half a minute,' and was informed that it was exactly the amount of time the captain could afford to wait.

Weyburn had seen the Steignton phaeton and coachman in the earl's light-blue livery. It was at his orders, he heard. He told the coachman to expect him shortly, and he followed the captain, with a heavy trifle of suspicion that some brew was at work. He said to Aminta in the passage—

'You have your settlement with the innkeeper. Don't, I beg, step into the chariot till you see me.'

'Anything?' said she.

'Only prudence.'

'Our posting horses will be harnessed soon, I hope. I burn to get away.'

Mrs. Pagnell paid the bill at the bar of the inn. Morsfield poured out for the injured countess or no-countess a dram of the brandy of passion, under the breath.

'Deny that you singled me once for your esteem. Hardest-hearted of the women of earth and dearest! deny that you gave me reason to hope—and now! I have ridden in your track all this way for the sight of you, as you know, and you kill me with frost. Yes, I rejoice that we were seen together. Look on me. I swear I perish for one look of kindness. You have been shamefully used, madam.'

'It seems to me I am being so,' said Aminta, cutting herself loose from the man of the close eyes that wavered as they shot the dart.

Her action was too decided for him to follow her up under the observation of the inn windows and a staring street.

Mrs. Pagnell came out. She went boldly to Morsfield and they conferred. He was led by her to the chariot, where she pointed to a small padded slab of a seat back to the horses. Turning to the bar, he said: 'My friend will look to my horse. Both want watering and a bucketful. There!'—he threw silver—'I have to protect the ladies.'

Aminta was at the chariot door talking to her aunt inside.

'But I say I have been insulted—is the word—more than enough by Lord Ormont to-day!' Mrs. Pagnell exclaimed; 'and I won't, I positively refuse to ride up to London with any servant of his. It 's quite sufficient that it 's his servant. I 'm not titled, but I 'm not quite dirt. Mr. Morsfield kindly offers his protection, and I accept. He is company.'

Nodding and smirking at Morsfield's approach, she

entreated Aminta to step up and in, for the horses were coming out of the yard.

Aminta looked round. Weyburn was perceived; and Morsfield's features cramped at thought of a hitch in the plot.

'Possession,' Mrs. Pagnell murmured significantly. She patted the seat. Morsfield sprang to Weyburn's place.

That was witnessed by Aminta and Weyburn. She stepped to consult him. He said to the earl's coachman —a young fellow with a bright eye for orders—

'Drive as fast as you can pelt for Dornton. I 'm doing my lord's commands.'

'Trust yourself to me, madam.' His hand stretched for Aminta to mount. She took it without a word and climbed to the seat. A clatter of hoofs rang out with the crack of the whip. They were away behind a pair of steppers that could go the pace.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PURSUERS

For promptitude, the lady, the gentleman, and the coachman were in such unison as to make it a reasonable deduction that the flight had been concerted.

Never did any departure from the Roebuck leave so wide-mouthed a body of spectators. Mrs. Pagnell's shrieks of 'Stop, oh! stop!' to the backs of the coachman and Aminta were continued until they were far down the street. She called to the innkeeper, called to the landlady and to invisible constables for help. But her pangs were childish compared with Morsfield's,

who, with the rage of a conceited schemer tricked and the fury of a lover beholding the rape of his beautiful, bellowed impotently at Weyburn and the coachman out of hearing, 'Stop! you!' He was in the state of men who believe that there is a virtue in imprecations, and he shot loud oaths after them, shook his fist, cursed his friend Cumnock, whose name he vociferated as a summons to him,—generally the baffled plotter misconducted himself to an extreme degree, that might have apprised Mrs. Pagnell of a more than legitimate disappointment on his part.

Pursuit was one of the immediate ideas which rush forward to look back woefully on impediments and fret to fever over the tardiness of operations. A glance at the thing of wrinkles receiving orders to buckle at his horses and pursue convinced them of the hopelessness; and Morsfield was pricked to intensest hatred of the woman by hearing the dire exclamation, 'One night, and her character 's gone!'

'Be quiet, ma'am, if you please, or nothing can be done,' he cried.

'I tell you, Mr. Morsfield—don't you see?—he has thrown them together. It is Lord Ormont's wicked conspiracy to rid himself of her. A secretary! He 'll beat any one alive in plots. She can't show her face in London after this, if you don't overtake her. And she might have seen Lord Ormont's plot to ruin her. He tired of her, and was ashamed of her inferior birth to his own, after the first year, except on the Continent, where she had her rights. Me he never forgave for helping make him the happy man he might have been in spite of his age. For she is lovely! But it 's worse for a lovely woman with a damaged reputation. And that 's his cunning. How she could be so silly as to play into it! She can't have demeaned herself to look on that

secretary! I said from the first he seemed as if thrown into her way for a purpose. But she has pride: my niece Aminta has pride. She might well have listened to flatterers—she had every temptation—if it hadn't been for her pride. It may save her yet. However good-looking, she will remember her dignity—unless he 's a villain. Runnings away! drivings together! inns! oh! the story over London! I do believe she has a true friend in you, Mr. Morsfield; and I say, as I have said before, the sight of a devoted admirer would have brought any husband of *more* than sixty to his senses, if he hadn't hoped a catastrophe and determined on it. Catch them we can't, unless she repents and relents; and prayers for that are our only resource. Now, start, man, do!'

The postillion had his foot in position to spring.

Morsfield bawled Cumnock's name, and bestrode his horse. Captain Cumnock emerged from the inn-yard with a dubitative step, pressing a handkerchief to his nose, blinking, and scrutinizing the persistent fresh stains on it.

Stable-boys were at the rear. These, ducking and springing, surcharged and copious exponents of the play they had seen, related, for the benefit of the town, how that the two gentlemen had exchanged words in the yard, which were about beastly pistols, which the slim gentleman would have none of; and then the big one trips up, like dancing, to the other one and flicks him a soft clap on the cheek—quite friendly, you may say; and before he can square to it, the slim one he steps his hind leg half a foot back, and he drives a straight left like lightning off the shoulder slick on to t' other one's nob, and over he rolls, like a cart with the shafts up down a bank; and he' s been washing his 'chops' and threatening bullets ever since.

The exact account of the captain's framework in the process of the fall was graphically portrayed in our blunt and racy vernacular, which a society nourished upon Norman-English and English-Latin banishes from print, largely to its impoverishment, some think.

By the time the primary narrative of the encounter in the inn yard had given ground for fancy and ornament to present it in yet more luscious dress, Lord Ormont's phaeton was a good mile on the road. Morsfield and Captain Cumnock—the latter inquisitive of the handkerchief pressed occasionally at his nose—trotted on tired steeds along dusty wheel-tracks. Mrs. Pagnell was the solitary of the chariot, having a horrid couple of loaded pistols to intimidate her for her protection, and the provoking back view of a regularly jogging mannikin under a big white hat with blue riband, who played the part of Time in dragging her along, with worse than no countenance for her anxieties.

News of the fugitives was obtained at the rampant Red Lion in Dudsworth, nine miles on along the London road, to the extent that the Earl of Ormont's phaeton, containing a lady and a gentleman, had stopped there a minute to send back word to Steignton of their comfortable progress, and expectations of crossing the borders into Hampshire before sunset. Morsfield and Cumnock shrugged at the bumpkin artifice. They left their line of route to be communicated to the chariot, and chose, with practised acumen, that very course, which was the main road, and rewarded them at the end of half an hour with sight of the Steignton phaeton.

But it was returning. A nearer view showed it empty of the couple.

Morsfield bade the coachman pull up, and he was readily obeyed. Answers came briskly.

Although provincial acting is not of the high class

which conceals the art, this man's look beside him and behind him at vacant seats had incontestable evidence in support of his declaration, that the lady and gentleman had gone on by themselves: the phaeton was a box of flown birds.

'Where did you say they got out, you dog?' said Cumnock.

The coachman stood up to spy a point below. 'Down there at the bottom of the road, to the right, where there 's a stile across the meadows, making a short cut by way of a bridge over the river to Busley and North Tothill, on the high-road to Hocklebourne. The lady and gentleman thought they 'd walk for a bit of exercise the remains of the journey.'

'Can't prove the rascal 's a liar,' Cumnock said to Morsfield, who rallied him savagely on his lucky escape from another knock-down blow, and tossed silver on the seat, and said—

'We 'll see if there is a stile.'

'You 'll see the stile, sir,' rejoined the man, and winked at their backs.

Both cavaliers, being famished besides baffled, were in sour tempers, expecting to see just the dead wooden stile, and see it as a grin at them. Cumnock called on Jove to witness that they had been donkeys enough to forget to ask the driver how far round on the road it was to the other end of the cross-cut.

Morsfield, entirely objecting to asinine harness with him, mocked at his invocation and intonation of the name of Jove.

Cumnock was thereupon stung to a keen recollection of the allusion to his knock-down blow, and he retorted that there were some men whose wit was the parrot's.

Morsfield complimented him over the exhibition of a

vastly superior and more serviceable wit, in losing sight of his antagonist after one trial of him.

Cumnock protested that the loss of time was caused by his friend's dalliance with the Venus in the chariot.

Morsfield's gall seethed at a flying picture of Mrs. Pagnell, coupled with the retarding reddened handkerchief business, and he recommended Cumnock to pay court to the old woman, as the only chance he would have of acquaintanceship with the mother of Love.

Upon that Cumnock confessed in humility to his not being wealthy. Morsfield looked a willingness to do the deed he might have to pay for in tenderer places than the pocket, and named the head as a seat of poverty with him.

Cumnock then yawned a town fop's advice to a hustling street passenger to apologize for his rudeness before it was too late. Whereat Morsfield, certain that his parasitic thrasyleon apeing coxcomb would avoid extremities, mimicked him execrably.

Now this was a second breach of the implied convention existing among the exquisitely fine-bred silken-slender on the summits of our mundane sphere, which demands of them all, that they respect one another's affectations. It is commonly done, and so the costly people of a single pattern contrive to push forth, flatteringly to themselves, luxuriant shoots of individuality in their orchidean glass-house. A violation of the rule is a really deadly personal attack. Captain Cumnock was particularly sensitive regarding it, inasmuch as he knew himself not the natural performer he strove to be, and a mimicry affected him as a haunting check.

He burst out: 'Damned if I don't understand why you 're hated by men and women both!'

Morsfield took a shock. 'Infernal hornet!' he muttered; for his conquests had their secret history.

'May and his wife have a balance to pay will trip you yet, you 'll find.'

'Reserve your wrath, sir, for the man who stretched you on your back.'

The batteries of the two continued exchangeing red-hot shots, with the effect, that they had to call to mind they were looking at the stile. A path across a butter-cup meadow was beyond it. They were damped to some coolness by the sight.

'Upon my word, the trick seems neat!' said Cumnock, staring at the pastoral curtain.

'Whose trick?' he was asked sternly.

'Here or there 's not much matter; they 're off, unless they 're under a hedge laughing.'

An ache of jealousy and spite was driven through the lover, who groaned, and presently said—

'I ride on. That old woman can follow. I don't want to hear her gibberish. We 've lost the game—there 's no reckoning the luck. If there 's a chance, it 's this way. It smells a trick. He and she—by all the devils! It has been done in my family—might have been done again. Tell the men on the plain they can drive home. There 's a hundred-pound weight on your tongue for silence.'

Cumnock cried: 'But we needn't be parting, Dolf! Stick together. Bad luck 's not repeated every day. Keep heart for the good.'

'My heart 's shattered, Cumnock. I say it 's impossible she can love a husband twice her age, who treats her—you 've seen. Contempt of that lady! By heaven! once in my power, I swear she would have been sacred to me. But she would have been compelled to face the public and take my hand. I swear she would have been congratulated on the end of her sufferings. Worship!—that 's what I feel. No woman ever alive

had eyes in her head like that lady's. I repeat her name ten times every night before I go to sleep. If I had her hand, no, not one kiss would I press on it without her sanction. I could be in love with her cruelty, if only I had her near me. I 've lost her—by the Lord, I 've lost her!'

'*Pro tem.*,' said the captain. 'A plate of red beef and a glass of port wine alters the view. Too much in the breast, too little in the belly, capsizes lovers. Old story. Horses that ought to be having a mash between their ribs make riders despond. Say, shall we back to the town behind us, or on? Back 's the safest, if the chase is up.'

Morsfield declared himself incapable of turning and meeting that chariot. He sighed heavily. Cumnock offered to cheer him with a song of Captain Chanter's famous collection, if he liked; but Morsfield gesticulated abhorrence, and set out at a trot. Song in defeat was a hiss of derision to him.

He had failed. Having failed, he for the first time perceived the wildness of a plot that had previously appeared to him as one of the Yorkshire Morsfields' moves to win an object. Traditionally they stopped at nothing. There would have been a sunburst of notoriety in the capture and carrying off of the beautiful Countess of Ormont.

She had eluded him during the downward journey to Steignton. He came on her track at the village at the junction of the roads above Ashead, and thence, confiding in the half-connivance or utter stupidity of the fair one's duenna, despatched a mounted man-servant to his coachman and footmen, stationed ten miles behind, with orders that they should drive forthwith to the great plain, and be ready at a point there for two succeeding days. That was the plot, promptly devised upon receipt

of Mrs. Pagnell's communication; for the wealthy man of pleasure was a strategist fit to be a soldier, in dexterity not far from rivalling the man by whom he had been outdone.

An ascetic on the road to success, he dedicated himself to a term of hard drinking under a reverse; and the question addressed to the chief towns in the sketch counties his head contained was, which one near would be likely to supply the port wine for floating him through garlanding dreams of possession most tastily to blest oblivion.

He was a lover, nevertheless, honest in his fashion, and meant not worse than to pull his lady through a mire, and wash her with Morsfield soap, and crown her, and worship. She was in his blood, about him, above him; he had plunged into her image, as into deeps that broke away in phosphorescent waves on all sides, reflecting every remembered, every imagined, aspect of the adored beautiful woman piercing him to extinction with that last look of her at the moment of flight.

Had he been just a trifle more sincere in the respect he professed for his lady's duenna, he would have turned on the road to Dornton and a better fortune. Mrs. Pagnell had now become the ridiculous Paggy of Mrs. Lawrence Finchley and her circle for the hypocritical gentleman; and he remarked to Captain Cumnock, when their mutual trot was established: 'Paggy enough for me for a month—good Lord! I can't stand another dose of her by herself.'

'It 's a bird that won't roast or boil or stew,' said the captain.

They were observed trotting along below by Lord Ormont's groom of the stables on promotion, as he surveyed the country from the chalk-hill rise and brought the phaeton to a stand, Jonathan Boon, a sharp lad,

whose comprehension was a little muddled by 'the rights of it' in this adventure. He knew, however, that he did well to follow the directions of one who was in his lordship's pay, and stretched out the fee with the air of a shake of the hand, and had a look of the winning side, moreover. A born countryman could see that.

Boon watched the pair of horsemen trotting to confusion, and clicked in his cheek. The provincial of the period when coaches were beginning to be threatened by talk of new-fangled rails was proud to boast of his outwitting Londoners on material points; and Boon had numerous tales of how it had been done, to have the laugh of fellows thinking themselves such razors. They compensated him for the slavish abasement of his whole neighbourhood under the hectoring of the grand new manufacture of wit in London:—the inimitable Metropolitan PUN, which came down to the country by four-in-hand, and stopped all other conversation wherever it was reported, and would have the roar—there was no resisting it. Indeed, to be able to see the thing smartly was an entry into community with the elect of the district; and when the roaring ceased and the thing was examined, astonishment at the cleverness of it, and the wonderful shallowness of the seeming deep hole, and the unexhausted bang it had to go off like a patent cracker, fetched it out for telling over again; and up went the roar, and up it went at home and in stable-yards, and at the net puffing of churchwardens on a summer's bench, or in a cricket-booth after a feast, or round the old inn's taproom fire. The pun, the wonderful bo-peep of double meanings darting out to surprise and smack one another from behind words of the same sound, sometimes the same spelling, overwhelmed the provincial mind with awe of London's occult and prolific genius.

Yet down yonder you may behold a pair of London gentlemen trotting along on as fine a fool's errand as ever was undertaken by nincompoops bearing a sealed letter, marked urgent, to a castle, and the request in it that the steward would immediately upon perusal down with their you-know-what and hoist them and birch them a jolly two dozen without parley.

Boon smacked his leg, and then drove ahead merrily.

For this had happened to his knowledge: the gentleman accompanying the lady had refused to make anything of a halt at the Red Lion, and had said he was sure there would be a small public-house at the outskirts of the town, for there always was one; and he proved right, and the lady and he had descended at the sign of the Jolly Cricketers, and Boon had driven on for half an hour by order.

This, too, had happened, external to Boon's knowledge: the lady and the gentleman had witnessed, through the small diamond window-panes of the Jolly Cricketers' parlour, the passing-by of the two horsemen in pursuit of them; and the gentleman had stopped the chariot coming on some fifteen minutes later, but he did not do it at the instigation of the lady.

CHAPTER XX

AT THE SIGN OF THE JOLLY CRICKETERS

The passing-by of the pair of horsemen, who so little suspected the treasure existing behind the small inn's narrow window, did homage in Aminta's mind to her protector's adroitness. Their eyes met without a smile,

though they perceived the grisly comic of the incident. Their thoughts were on the chariot to follow.

Aminta had barely uttered a syllable since the start of the flight from Ashead. She had rocked in a swing between sensation and imagination, exultant, rich with the broad valley of the plain and the high green waves of the downs at their giant's bound in the flow of curves and sunny creases to the final fling-off of the dip on sky. Here was a twisted hawthorn carved clean to the way of the wind; a sheltered clump of chestnuts holding their blossoms up, as with a thousand cresset-clasping hands; here were grasses that nodded swept from green to grey; flowers yellow, white, and blue, significant of a marvellous unknown through the gates of colour; and gorse-covers giving out the bird, squares of young wheat, a single fallow threaded by a hare, and cottage gardens, shadowy garths, wayside flint-heap, woods of the mounds and the dells, fluttering leaves, clouds: all were swallowed, all were the one unworded significance. Scenery flew, shifted, returned; again the line of the downs raced and the hollows reposed simultaneously. They were the same in change to an eye grown older; they promised, as at the first, happiness for recklessness. The whole woman was urged to delirious recklessness in happiness, and she drank the flying scenery as an indication, a likeness, an encouragement.

When her wild music of the blood had fallen to stillness with the stopped wheels, she was in the musky, small, low room of the diamond window-panes, at her companion's disposal for what he might deem the best: he was her fate. But the more she leaned on a man of self-control, the more she admired; and an admiration that may not speak itself to the object present drops inward, stirs the founts; and if these are repressed, the tenderness which is not allowed to weep will drown self-pity,

hardening the woman to summon scruples in relation to her unworthiness. He might choose to forget, but the more she admired, the less could her feminine conscience permit of an utter or of any forgetfulness that she was not the girl Browny, whom he once loved—perhaps loved now, under some illusion of his old passion for her —does love now, ill-omened as he is in that! She read him by her startled reading of her own heart, and she constrained her will to keep from doing, saying, looking aught that would burden without gracing his fortunes. For, as she felt, a look, a word, a touch would do the mischief; she had no resistance behind her cold face, only the physical scruple, which would become the moral unworthiness if in any way she induced him to break his guard and blow hers to shreds. An honourable conscience before the world has not the same certificate in love's pure realm. They are different kingdoms. A girl may be of both; a married woman, peering outside the narrow circle of her wedding-ring, should let her eyelids fall and the unseen fires consume her.

Their common thought was now, Will the chariot follow?

What will he do if it comes? was an unformed question with Aminta.

He had formed and not answered it, holding himself, sincerely at the moment, bound to her wishes. Near the end of Ashead main street she had turned to him in her seat beside the driver, and conveyed silently, with the dental play of her tongue and pouted lips, 'No title.'

Upon that sign, waxen to those lips, he had said to the driver, 'You took your orders from Lady Charlotte?'

And the reply, 'Her ladyship directed me, sir,' exonerated Lord Ormont so far.

Weyburn remembered then a passage of one of her

steady looks, wherein an oracle was mute. He tried several of the diviner's shots to interpret it: she was beyond his reach. She was in her blissful delirium of the flight, and reproached him with giving her the little bit less to resent—she who had no sense of resentment, except the claim on it to excuse.

Their landlady entered the room to lay the cloth for tea and eggs. She made offer of bacon as well, home-cured. She was a Hampshire woman, and understood the rearing of pigs. Her husband had been a cricketer, and played for his county. He didn't often beat Hampshire! They had a good garden of vegetables, and grass-land enough for two cows. They made their own bread, their own butter, but did not brew.

Weyburn pronounced for a plate of her home-cured. She had children, the woman told him—two boys and a girl. Her husband wished for a girl. Her eldest boy wished to be a sailor, and would walk miles to a pond to sail bits of wood on it, though there had never been a sea-faring man in her husband's family or her own. She agreed with the lady and gentleman that it might be unwise to go contrary to the boy's bent. Going to school or coming home, a trickle of water would stop him.

Aminta said to her companion in French, 'Have you money?'

She chased his blood.

'Some: sufficient, I think.'

It stamped their partnership.

I have but a small amount. Aunt was our paymaster. We will buy the little boy a boat to sail. You are pale.'

'I 've no notion of it.'

'Something happened at Ashead.'

'It would not have damaged my complexion.'

He counted his money. Aminta covertly handed

Their landlady entered the room

him her purse. Their fingers touched. The very minor circumstance of their landlady being in the room dammed a flood.

Her money and his amounted to seventeen pounds. The sum-total was a symbol of days that were a fiery wheel.

Honour and blest adventure might travel together two days or three, he thought. If the chariot did not pass:—Lord Ormont had willed it. A man could not be said to swerve in his duty when acting to fulfil the master's orders; and Mrs. Pagnell was proved a hoodwinked duenna, and Morsfield was in the air. The breathing Aminta had now a common purse with her first lover. For three days or more they were, it would seem, to journey together, alone together: the prosecution of his duty imposed it on him. Sooth to say, Weyburn knew that a spice of passion added to a bowl of reason makes a sophist's mess; but he fancied an absolute reliance on Aminta's dignity, and his respect for her was another barrier. He begged the landlady's acceptance of two shillings for her boy's purchase of a boat, advising her to have him taught early to swim. Both he and Aminta had a feeling that they could be helpful in some little things on the road if the chariot did not pass.

Justification began to speak loudly against the stopping of the chariot if it did pass. The fact that sweet wishes come second, and not so loudly, assured him they were quite secondary; for the lover sunk to sophist may be self-beguiled by the arts which render him the potent beguiler.

'We are safe here,' he said, and thrilled her with the 'we' behind the curtaining leaded window-panes.

'What is it you propose?' Her voice was lower than she intended. To that she ascribed his vivid flush. It kindled the deeper of her dark hue.

He mentioned her want of luggage, and the purchase of a kit.

She said, 'Have we the means?'

'We can adjust the means to the ends.'

'We must be sparing of expenses.'

'Will you walk part of the way?'

'I should like it.'

'We shall be longer on the journey.'

'We shall not find it tiresome, I hope.'

'We can say so, if we do.'

'We are not strangers.'

The recurrence of the 'we' had an effect of wedding: it was fatalistic, it would come; but, in truth, there was pleasure in it, and the pleasure was close to consciousness of some guilt when vowing itself innocent.

And, no, they were not strangers; hardly a word could they utter without cutting memory to the quick; their present breath was out of the far past.

Love told them both that they were trembling into one another's arms, not voluntarily, against the will with each of them; they knew it would be for life; and Aminta's shamed reserves were matched to make an obstacle by his consideration for her good name and her station, for his own claim to honest citizenship also.

Weyburn acted on his instinct at sight of the postillion and the chariot; he flung the window wide and shouted. Then he said, 'It is decided,' and he felt the rightness of the decision, like a man who has given a condemned limb to the surgeon.

Aminta was passive as a water-weed in the sway of the tide. Hearing it to be decided, she was relieved. What her secret heart desired, she kept secret, almost a secret from herself. He was not to leave her; so she had her permitted wish, she had her companion *plus*

her exclamatory aunt, who was a protection, and she had learnt her need of the smallest protection.

'I can scarcely believe I see you, my dear, dear child!' Mrs. Pagnell cried, upon entering the small inn parlour; and so genuine was her satisfaction that for a time she paid no heed to the stuffiness of the room, the meanness of the place, the unfitness of such a hostelry to entertain ladies—the Countess of Ormont!

'Eat here?' Mrs. Pagnell asked, observing the preparations for the meal. Her pride quailed, her stomach abjured appetite. But she forbore from asking how it was that the Countess of Ormont had come to the place.

At a symptom of her intention to indulge in disgust, Aminta brought up Mr. Morsfield by name; whereupon Mrs. Pagnell showed she had reflected on her conduct in relation to the gentleman, and with the fear of the earl if she were questioned.

Home-made bread and butter, fresh eggs and sparkling fat of bacon invited her to satisfy her hunger. Aminta let her sniff at the teapot unpunished; the tea had a rustica roma of ground-ivy, reminding Weyburn of his mother's curiosity to know the object of an old man's plucking of hedgeside leaves in the environs of Bruges one day, and the simple reply to her French, 'Tea for the English.' A hint of an anecdote interested and enriched the stores of Mrs. Pagnell, so she capped it and partook of the infusion ruefully.

'But the bread is really good,' she said, 'and we are unlikely to be seen leaving the place by any person of importance.'

'Unless Mr. Morsfield should be advised to return this way,' said Aminta.

Her aunt proposed for a second cup. She was a manageable woman; the same scourge had its instant wholesome effect on her when she snubbed the secretary.

So she complimented his trencherman's knife, of which the remarkably fine edge was proof enough that he had come heart-whole out of the trial of an hour or so's intimate companionship with a beautiful woman, who had never been loved, never could be loved by man, as poor Mr. Morsfield loved her! He had sworn to having fasted three whole days and nights after his first sight of Aminta. Once, he said, her eyes pierced him so that he dreamed of a dagger in his bosom, and woke himself plucking at it. That was love, as a born gentleman connected with a baronetcy and richer than many lords took the dreadful passion. A secretary would have no conception of such devoted extravagance. At the most he might have attempted to insinuate a few absurd, sheepish soft nothings, and the Countess of Ormont would know right well how to shrivel him with one of her looks. No lady of the land could convey so much either way, to attract or to repel, as Aminta, Countess of Ormont! And the man, the only man, insensible to her charm or her scorn, was her own wedded lord and husband. Old, to be sure, and haughty, his pride might not allow him to overlook poor Mr. Morsfield's unintentional offence. But the presence of the countess's aunt was a reply to any charge he might seek to establish. Unhappily, the case is one between men on their touchiest point, when women are pushed aside, and justice and religion as well. We might be living in a heathen land, for aught that morality has to say.

Mrs. Pagnell fussed about being seen on her emergence from the Jolly Cricketers. Aminta sent Weyburn to spy for the possible reappearance of Mr. Morsfield. He reported a horseman; a butcher-boy clattered by. Aminta took the landlady's hand, under her aunt's astonished gaze, and said: 'I shall not forget your house and your attention to us.' She spoke with a shake of her

voice. The landlady curtseyed and smiled, curtseyed and almost whimpered. The house was a poor one, she begged to say; they didn't often have such guests, but whoever came to it they did their best to give good food and drink.

Hearing from Weyburn that the chariot was bound to go through Winchester, she spoke of a brother, a baker there, the last surviving member of her family; and, after some talk, Weyburn offered to deliver a message of health and greeting at the baker's shop. There was a waving of hands, much nodding and curtseying, as the postillion resumed his demi-volts—all to the stupefaction of Mrs. Pagnell; but she dared not speak, she had Morsfield on the mouth. Nor could she deny the excellent quality of the bread and butter, and milk, too, at the sign of the Jolly Cricketers. She admitted, moreover, that the food and service of the little inn belonged in their unpretentious honesty to the kind we call old English: the dear old simple country English of the brotherly interchange in sight of heaven —good stuff for good money, a matter with a blessing on it.

'But,' said she, 'my dear Aminta, I do not and I cannot understand looks of grateful affection at a small innkeeper's wife paid, and I don't doubt handsomely paid, for her entertainment of you.'

'I feel it,' said Aminta; tears rushed to her eyelids, overflowing, and her features were steady.

'Ah, poor dear! that I do understand,' her aunt observed. 'Any little kindness moves you to-day; and well it may.'

'Yes, aunty,' said Aminta, and in relation to the cause of her tears she was the less candid of the two.

So far did she carry her thanks for a kindness as to glance back through her dropping tears at the sign-board

of the Jolly Cricketers; where two brave batsmen cross for the second of a certain three runs, if only the fellow wheeling legs, face up after the ball in the clouds, does but miss his catch: a grand suspensory moment of the game, admirably chosen by the artist to arrest the wayfarer and promote speculation. For will he let her slip through his fingers when she comes down? or will he have her fast and tight? And in the former case, the bats are tearing their legs off for just number nought. And in the latter, there 's a wicket down, and what you may call a widower walking it bat on shoulder, parted from his mate for that mortal innings, and likely to get more chaff than consolation when he joins the booth.

CHAPTER XXI

UNDER-CURRENTS IN THE MINDS OF LADY CHARLOTTE AND LORD ORMONT

Another journey of travellers to London, in the rear of the chariot, was not diversified by a single incident or refreshed by scraps of dialogue. Lady Charlotte had her brother Rowsley with her, and he might be taciturn, —she drove her flocks of thoughts, she was busily and contentedly occupied. Although separation from him stirred her mind more excitedly over their days and deeds of boy and girl, her having him near, and having now won him to herself, struck her as that old time's harvest, about as much as can be hoped for us from life, when we have tasted it.

The scene of the invasion of Steignton by the woman and her aunt, and that man Morsfield, was a steel engraving among her many rapid and featureless

cogitations. She magnified the rakishness of the woman's hand on hip in view of the house, and she magnified the woman's insolence in bringing that man Morsfield—to share probably the hospitality of Steignton during the master's absence! Her trick of caricature, whenever she dealt with adversaries, was active upon the three persons under observation of the windows. It was potent to convince her that her brother Rowsley had cast the woman to her native obscurity. However, Lady Charlotte could be just: the woman's figure, and as far as could be seen of her face, accounted for Rowsley's entanglement.

Why chastize that man Morsfield at all? Calling him out would give a further dip to the name of Ormont. A pretty idea, to be punishing a man for what you thank him for! He did a service; and if he 's as mad about her as he boasts, he can take her and marry her now: Rowsley 's free of her.

Morsfield says he wants to marry her—wants nothing better. Then let him. Rowsley has shown him there 's no legal impediment. Pity that young Weyburn had to be sent to do watch-dog duty. But Rowsley would not have turned her back to travel alone: that is, without a man to guard. He 's too chivalrous.

The sending of Weyburn, she now fancied, was her own doing, and Lady Charlotte attributed it to her interpretation of her brother's heart of chivalry; though it would have been the wiser course, tending straight and swift to the natural end, if the two women and their Morsfield had received the dismissal to travel as they came.

One sees it after the event. Yes, only Rowsley would not have dismissed her without surety that she would be protected. So it was the right thing prompted on the impulse of the moment. And young Weyburn would

meet some difficulty in protecting his 'Lady Ormont,' if she had no inclination for it.

Analyzing her impulse of the moment, Lady Charlotte credited herself, not unjustly, with a certain considerateness for the woman, notwithstanding the woman's violent intrusion between brother and sister. Knowing the world, and knowing the upper or Beanstalk world intimately, she winked at nature's passions. But when the legitimate affection of a brother and sister finds them interposing, they are, as little parsonically as possible, reproved. If persistently intrusive, they are handed to the constable.

How, supposing the case of a wife? Well, then comes the contest; and it is with an inferior, because not a born, legitimacy of union; which may be, which here and there is, affection; is generally the habit of partnership. It is inferior, from not being the union of the blood; it is a matter merely of the laws and the tastes. No love, she reasoned, is equal to the love of brother and sister: not even the love of parents for offspring, or of children for mother and father. Brother and sister have the holy young days in common; they have lastingly the recollection of their youth, the golden time when they were themselves, or the best of themselves. A wife is a stranger from the beginning; she is necessarily three parts a stranger up to the finish of the history. She thinks she can absorb the husband. Not if her husband has a sister living! She may cry and tear for what she calls her own: she will act prudently in bowing her head to the stronger tie. Is there a wife in Europe who broods on her husband's merits and his injuries as the sister of Thomas Rowsley, Earl of Ormont, does? or one to defend his good name, one to work for his fortunes, as devotedly?

Over and over Lady Charlotte drove her flocks, of

much the same pattern, like billows before a piping gale. They might be similar—a puffed iteration, and might be meaningless and wearisome; the gale was a power in earnest.

Her brother sat locked-up. She did as a wife would not have done, and held her peace. He spoke; she replied in a few words—blunt, to the point, as no wife would have done.

Her dear, warm-hearted Rowsley was shaken by the blow he had been obliged to deal to the woman—poor woman!—if she felt it. He was always the principal sufferer where the feelings were concerned. He was never for hurting any but the enemy.

His 'Ha, here we dine!' an exclamation of a man of imprisoned yawns at the apparition of the turnkey, was delightful to her, for a proof of health and sanity and enjoyment of the journey.

'Yes, and I 've one bottle left, in the hamper, of the hock you like,' she said. 'That Mr. Weyburn likes it too. He drank a couple coming down.'

She did not press for talk; his ready appetite was the flower of conversation to her. And he slept well, he said. Her personal experience on that head was reserved.

London enfolded them in the late evening of a day brewing storm. My lord heard at the door of his house that Lady Ormont had not arrived. Yet she had started a day in advance of him. He looked down, up and round at Charlotte. He looked into an empty hall.

Pagnell was not there. A sight of Pagnell would, strange to say, have been agreeable.

Storm was in the air, and Aminta was on the road. Lightning has, before now, frightened carriage-horses. She would not misconduct herself; she would sit firm. No woman in England had stouter nerve—few men.

But the carriage might be smashed. He was ignorant of the road she had chosen for her return. Out of Wiltshire there would be no cliffs, quarries, river-banks, presenting dangers. Those dangers, however, spring up when horses have the frenzy.

Charlotte was nodded at, for a signal to depart; and she drove off, speculating on the bullet of a grey eye, which was her brother's adieu to her.

The earl had apparently a curiosity to inspect vacant rooms. His Aminta's drawing-room, her boudoir, her bed-chamber, were submissive in showing bed, knick-knacks, furniture. They told the tale of a corpse.

He washed and dressed, and went out to his club to dine; hating the faces of the servants of the house, just able to bear with the attentions of his valet.

Thunder was rattling at ten at night. The house was again the tomb.

She had high courage, that girl. She might be in a bed, with her window-blind up, calmly waiting for the flashes: lightning excited her. He had seen her lying at her length quietly, her black hair scattered on the pillow, like shadow of twigs and sprays on moonlit grass, illuminated intermittently; smiling to him, but her heart out and abroad, wild as any witch's. If on the road, she would not quail. But it was necessary to be certain of her having a trusty postillion.

He walked through the drench and scream of a burst cloud to the posting-office. There, after some trouble, he obtained information directing him to the neighbouring mews. He had thence to find his way to the neighbouring pot-house.

The report of the postillion was, on the whole, favourable. The man understood horses—was middle-aged—no sot; he was also a man with an eye for weather, proverbially in the stables a cautious hand—slow

'Old Slow-and-sure,' he was called; by name, Joshua Abnett.

'Oh, Joshua Abnett?' said the earl, and imprinted it on his memory, for the service it was to do during the night.

Slow-and-sure Joshua Abnett would conduct her safely, barring accidents. For accidents we must all be prepared. She was a heroine in an accident. The earl recalled one and more: her calm face, brightened eyes, easy laughter. Hysterics were not in her family.

She did wrong to let that fellow Morsfield accompany her. Possibly he had come across her on the road, and she could not shake him off. Judging by all he knew of her, the earl believed she would not have brought the fellow into the grounds of Steignton of her free will. She had always a particular regard for decency.

According to the rumour, Morsfield and the woman Pagnell were very thick together. He barked over London of his being a bitten dog. He was near to the mad dog's fate, as soon as a convenient apology for stopping his career could be invented.

The thinking of the lesson to Morsfield on the one hand, and of the slow-and-sure postillion Joshua Abnett on the other, lulled Lord Ormont to a short repose in his desolate house. Of Weyburn he had a glancing thought, that the young man would be a good dog to guard the countess from a mad dog, as he had reckoned in commissioning him.

Next day was the day of sunlight Aminta loved.

It happens with the men who can strike, supposing them of the order of civilized creatures, that when they have struck heavily, however deserved the blow, a liking for the victim will assail them, if they discover no support in hatred; and no sooner is the spot of softness touched than they are invaded by hosts of the stricken

person's qualities, which plead to be taken as virtues, and are persuasive. The executioner did rightly. But it is the turn for the victim to declare the blow excessive.

Now, a just man, who has overdone the stroke, will indemnify and console in every way, short of humiliating himself.

He had an unusually clear vision of the scene at Steignton. Surprise and wrath obscured it at the moment, for reflection to bring it out in sharp outline; and he was able now to read and translate into inoffensive English the inherited Spanish of it, which violated nothing of Aminta's native *donayre*, though it might look on English soil outlandish or stagey.

Aminta stood in sunlight on the greensward. She stood hand on hip, gazing at the house she had so long desired to see, without a notion that she committed an offence. Implicitly upon all occasions she took her husband's word for anything he stated, and she did not consequently imagine him to be at Steignton. So, then, she had no thought of running down from London to hunt and confound him, as at first it appeared. The presence of that white-faced Morsfield vindicated her sufficiently so far. And let that fellow hang till the time for cutting him down! Not she, but Pagnell, seems to have been the responsible party. And, by the way, one might prick the affair with Morsfield by telling him publicly that his visit to inspect Steignton was waste of pains, for he would not be accepted as a tenant in the kennels, *et cætera*.

Well, poor girl, she satisfied her curiosity, not aware that a few weeks farther on would have done it to the full.

As to Morsfield, never once, either in Vienna or in Paris, had she, warmly admired though she was, all eyes telescoping and sun-glassing on her, given her husband

an hour or half an hour or two minutes of anxiety. Letters came. The place getting hot, she proposed to leave it.

She had been rather hardly tried. There are flowers we cannot keep growing in pots. Her fault was, that instead of flinging down her glove and fighting it out openly, she listened to Pagnell, and began the game of Pull. If he had a zest for the game, it was to stump the woman Pagnell. So the veteran fancied in his amended mind.

This intrusive sunlight chased him from the breakfast-table and out of the house. She would be enjoying it somewhere; but the house empty of a person it was used to contain had an atmosphere of the vaults, and inside it the sunlight she loved had an effect of taunting him singularly.

He called on his upholsterer and heard news to please her. The house hired for a month above Great Marlow was ready; her ladyship could enter it to-morrow. It pleased my lord to think that she might do so, and not bother him any more about the presentation at Court during the current year. In spite of certain overtures from the military authorities, and roused eulogistic citations of his name in the newspapers and magazines, he was not on friendly terms with his country yet, having contracted the fatal habit of irony, which, whether hitting or missing its object, stirs old venom in our wound, twitches the feelings. Unfortunately for him, they had not adequate expression unless he raged within; so he had to shake up wrath over his grievances, that he might be satisfactorily delivered; and he was judged irreconcilable when he had subsided into the quietest contempt, from the prospective seat of a country estate, in the society of a young wife who adored him.

An exile from the sepulchre of that house void of the

consecration of ashes, he walked the streets and became reconciled to street sunlight. There were no carriage accidents to disturb him with apprehensions. Besides, the slowness of the postillion Joshua Abnett, which probably helped to the delay, was warrant of his sureness. And in an accident the stringy fellow, young Weyburn, could be trusted for giving his attention to the ladies—especially to the younger of the two, taking him for the man his elders were at his age. As for Pagnell, a Providence watches over the Pagnells! Mortals have no business to interfere.

An accident on water would be a frolic to his girl. Swimming was a gift she had from nature. Pagnell vowed she swam out a mile at Dover when she was twelve. He had seen her in blue water: he had seen her readiness to jump to the rescue once when a market-woman, stepping out of a boat to his yacht on the Tabus, plumped in. She had the two kinds of courage—the impulsive and the reasoned. What is life to man or woman if we are not to live it honourably? Men worthy of the name say this. The woman who says and acts on it is—well, she is fit company for them. But only the woman of natural courage can say it and act on it.

Would she come by Winchester, or choose the lower road by Salisbury and Southampton, to smell the sea? perhaps—like her!—dismissing the chariot and hiring a yacht for a voyage round the coast and up the Thames. She had an extraordinary love of the sea, yet she preferred soldiers to sailors. A woman? Never one of them more a woman! But it came of her quickness to take the colour and share the tastes of the man to whom she gave herself.

My lord was beginning to distinguish qualities in a character.

He was informed at the mews that Joshua Abnett

was on the road still. Joshua seemed to be a roadster of uncommon unprogressiveness, proper to a framed picture.

While debating whether to lunch at his loathed club or at a home loathed more, but open to bright enlivenment any instant, Lord Ormont beheld a hat lifted and Captain May saluting him. They were near a famous gambling-house in St. James's Street.

'Good! I am glad to see you,' he said. 'Tell me: you know Mr. Morsfield pretty well. I 'm speaking of my affair. He has been trespassing down on my grounds at Steignton, and I think of taking the prosecution of him into my own hands. Is he in town?'

'I 've just left his lame devil Cumnock, my lord,' said May, after a slight grimace. 'They generally run in tandem.'

'Will you let me know?'

'At once, when I hear.'

'You will call on me? Before noon?'

'Any service required?'

'My respects to your wife.'

'Your lordship is very good.'

Captain May bloomed at a civility paid to his wife. He was a smallish, springy, firm-faced man, devotee of the lady bearing his name and wielding him. In the days when duelling flourished on our land, frail women could be powerful.

The earl turned from him to greet Lord Adderwood and a superior officer of his Profession, on whom he dropped a frigid nod. He held that all but the rank and file, and a few subalterns, of the service had abandoned him to do homage to the authorities. The Club he frequented was not his military Club. Indeed, lunching at any Club in solitariness that day, with Aminta away from home, was bitter penance. He was

rejoiced by Lord Adderwood's invitation, and hung to him after the lunch; for a horrible prospect of a bachelor dinner intimated astonishingly that he must have become unawares a domesticated man.

The solitary later meal of a bachelor was consumed, if the word will suit a rabbit's form of feeding. He fatigued his body by walking the streets and the bridge of the Houses of Parliament, and he had some sleep under a roof where a life like death, or death apeing life, would have seemed to him the Joshua Abnett, if he had been one to take up images.

Next day he was under the obligation to wait at home till noon. Shortly before noon a noise of wheels drew him to the window. A young lady, in whom he recognized Aminta's little school friend, of some name, stepped out of a fly. He met her in the hall.

She had expected to be welcomed by Aminta, and she was very timid on finding herself alone with the earl. He, however, treated her as the harbinger bird, wryneck of the nightingale, sure that Aminta would keep her appointment unless an accident delayed. He had forgotten her name, but not her favourite pursuit of botany; and upon that he discoursed, and he was interested, not quite independently of the sentiment of her being there as a guarantee of Aminta's return. Still he knew his English earth, and the counties and soil for particular wild-flowers, grasses, mosses; and he could instruct her and inspire a receptive pupil on the theme of birds, beasts, fishes, insects, in England and other lands.

He remained discoursing without much weariness till four of the afternoon. Then he had his reward. The chariot was at the door, and the mounted figure of Joshua Abnett, on which he cast not a look or a thought.

Aminta was alone. She embraced Selina Collett

warmly, and said, in friendly tones, 'Ah! my lord, you are in advance of me.'

She had dropped Mrs. Pagnell and Mr. Weyburn at two suburban houses; working upon her aunt's dread of the earl's interrogations as regarded Mr. Morsfield. She had, she said, chosen to take the journey easily on her return, and enjoyed it greatly.

My lord studied her manner more than her speech. He would have interpreted a man's accurately enough. He read hers to signify that she had really enjoyed her journey, 'made the best of it,' and did not intend to be humble about her visit to Steignton without his permission; but that, if hurt at the time, she had recovered her spirits, and was ready for a shot or two—to be nothing like a pitched battle. And she might fire away to her heart's content: wordy retorts would not come from him; he had material surprises in reserve for her. His question concerning Morsfield knew its answer, and would only be put under pressure.

Comparison of the friends Aminta and Selina was forced by their standing together, and the representation in little Selina of the inferiority of the world of women to his Aminta; he thought of several, and splendid women, foreign and English. The comparison rose sharply now, with Aminta's novel, airy, homely, unchallengeing assumption of an equal footing beside her lord, in looks and in tones that had cast off constraint of the adoring handmaid, to show the full-blown woman, rightful queen of her half of the dominion. Between the Aminta of then and now, the difference was marked as between Northern and Southern women: the frozen-mouthed Northerner and the pearl and rose-lipped Southerner; those who smirk in dropping congealed monosyllables, and those who radiantly laugh out the voluble chatter.

Conceiving this to the full in a mind destitute of imagery, but indicative of the thing as clearly as the planed, unpolished woodwork of a cabinet in a carpenter's shop, Lord Ormont liked her the better for the change, though she was not the woman whose absence from his house had caused him to go mooning half a night through the streets, and though it forewarned him of a tougher bit of battle, if battle there was to be.

He was a close reader of surfaces. But in truth, the change so notable came of the circumstance, that some little way down below the surface he perused, where heart weds mind, or nature joins intellect, for the two to beget a resolution, the battle of the man and the woman had been fought, and the man beaten.

CHAPTER XXII

TREATS OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE CONTENTION OF BROTHER AND SISTER

In the contest rageing at mid-sea still between the man and the woman, it is the one who is hard to the attractions of the other that will make choice of the spot and have the advantages. A short time earlier Lord Ormont could have marked it out at his leisure. He would have been unable to comprehend why it was denied him to do so now; for he was master of himself, untroubled by conscience, unaware, since he was assured of his Aminta's perfect safety and his restored sense of possession, that any taint of softness in him had reversed the condition of their alliance. He felt benevolently the much he had to bestow, and was about to bestow. Meanwhile, without complicity on his part, without his

knowledge, yet absolutely involving his fate, the battle had gone against him in Aminta's breast.

Like many of his class and kind, he was thoroughly acquainted with the physical woman, and he took that first and very engrossing volume of the great Book of Mulier for all the history. A powerful wing of imagination, strong as the flappers of the great Roc of Arabian story, is needed to lift the known physical woman even a very little way up into azure heavens. It is far easier to take a snap-shot at the psychic, and tumble her down from her fictitious heights to earth. The mixing of the two make nonsense of her. She was created to attract the man, for an excellent purpose in the main. We behold her at work incessantly. One is a fish to her hook; another a moth to her light. By the various arts at her disposal she will have us, unless early in life we tear away the creature's coloured gauzes and penetrate to her absurdly simple mechanism. That done, we may, if we please, dominate her. High priests of every religion have successively denounced her as the chief enemy. To subdue and bid her minister to our satisfaction is therefore a right employment of man's unperverted superior strength. Of course, we keep to ourselves the woman we prefer; but we have to beware of an uxorious preference, or we are likely to resemble the Irishman with his wolf, and dance imprisoned in the hug of our captive.

For it is the creature's characteristic to be lastingly awake, in her moments of utmost slavishness most keenly awake to the chances of the snaring of the stronger. Be on guard, then. Lord Ormont had been on guard then and always: his instinct of commandership kept him on guard. He was on guard now when his Aminta played, not the indignant and the frozen, but the genially indifferent. She did it well, he admitted.

Had it been the indignant she played, he might have stooped to cajole the handsome queen of gypsies she was, without acknowledgement of her right to complain. Feeling that he was about to be generous, he shrugged. He meant to speak in deeds.

Lady Charlotte's house was at the distance of a stroller's half-hour across Hyde Park westward from his own. Thither he walked, a few minutes after noon, prepared for cattishness. He could fancy that he had hitherto postponed the visit rather on her account, considering that he would have to crush her if she humped and spat, and he hoped to be allowed to do it gently. There would certainly be a scene.

Lady Charlotte was at home.

'Always at home to you, Rowsley, at any hour. Mr. Eglett has driven down to the City. There 's a doctor in a square there 's got a reputation for treating weak children, and he has taken down your grand-nephew Bobby to be inspected. Poor boy comes of a poor stock on the father's side. Mr. Eglett would have that marriage. Now he sees wealth isn't everything. Those Benlews are rushlights. However, Elizabeth stood with her father to have Robert Benlew, and this poor child 's the result. I wonder whether they have consciences!'

My lord prolonged the sibilation of his 'Yes,' in the way of absent-minded men. He liked little Bobby, but had to class the boy second for the present.

'You have our family jewels in your keeping, Charlotte?'

'No, I haven't,—and you know I haven't, Rowsley.'

She sprang to arms, the perfect porcupine, at his opening words, as he had anticipated.

'Where are the jewels?'

'They 're in the cellars of my bankers, and safe there, you may rely on it.'

'I want them.'

'I want to have them safe; and there they stop.'

'You must get them and hand them over.'

'To whom?'

'To me.'

'What for?'

'They will be worn by the Countess of Ormont.'

'Who 's she?'

'The lady who bears the title.'

'The only Countess of Ormont I know of is your mother and mine, Rowsley; and she 's dead.'

'The Countess of Ormont I speak of is alive.'

Lady Charlotte squared to him. 'Who gives her the title?'

'She bears it by right.'

'Do you mean to say, Rowsley, you have gone and married the woman since we came up from Steignton?'

'She is my wife.'

'Anyhow, she won't have our family jewels.'

'If you had swallowed them, you 'd have to disgorge.'

'I don't give up our family jewels to such people.'

'Do you decline to call on her?'

'I do: I respect our name and blood.'

'You will send the order to your bankers for them to deliver the jewels over to me at my house this day.'

'Look here, Rowsley; you 're gone cracked or senile. You 're in the hands of one of those clever wenches who catch men of your age. She may catch you; she shan't lay hold of our family jewels: they stand for the honour of our name and blood.'

'They are to be at my house-door at four o'clock this afternoon.'

'They 'll not stir.'

'Then I go down to your bankers and give them the order.'

'My bankers won't attend to it without the order from me.'

'You will submit to the summons of my lawyers.'

'You 're bent on a public scandal, are you?'

'I am bent on having the jewels.'

'They are not yours; you 've no claim to them; they are heirlooms in our family. Things most sacred to us are attached to them. They belong to our history. There 's the tiara worn by the first Countess of Ormont. There 's the big emerald of the necklace-pendant—you know the story of it. Two rubies not counted second to any in England. All those diamonds! I wore the cross and the two pins the day I was presented after my marriage.'

'The present Lady Ormont will wear them the day she is presented.'

'She won't wear them at Court.'

'She will.'

'Don't expect the Lady Ormont of tradesmen and footmen to pass the Lord Chamberlain.'

'That matter will be arranged for next season. Now I 've done.'

'So have I; and you have my answer, Rowsley.'

They quitted their chairs.

'You decline to call on my wife?' said the earl.

Lady Charlotte replied: 'Understand me, now. If the woman has won you round to legitimize the connection, first, I 've a proper claim to see her marriage lines. I must have a certificate of her birth. I must have a testified account of her life before you met her and got the worst of it. Then, as the case may be, I 'll call on her.'

'You will behave yourself when you call.'

'But she won't have our family jewels.'

'That affair has been settled by me.'

'I should be expecting to hear of them as decorating the person of one of that man Morsfield's mistresses.'

The earl's brow thickened. 'Charlotte, I smacked your cheek when you were a girl.'

'I know you did. You might again, and I wouldn't cry out. She travels with that Morsfield; you 've seen it. He goes boasting of her. Gypsy or not, she 's got queer ways.'

'I advise you, you had better learn at once to speak of her respectfully.'

'I shall have enough to go through, if what you say 's true, with questions of the woman's antecedents and her people, and the date of the day of this marriage. When was the day you did it? I shall have to give an answer. You know cousins of ours, and the way they 'll be pressing, and comparing ages and bawling rumours. None of them imagined my brother such a fool as to be wheedled into marrying her. You say it 's done, Rowsley. Was it done yesterday or the day before?'

Lord Ormont found unexpectedly that she struck on a weak point. Married from the first? Why not tell me of it? He could hear her voice as if she had spoken the words. And how communicate the pell-mell of reasons?

'You 're running vixen. The demand I make is for the jewels,' he said.

'You won't have them, Rowsley—not for her.'

'You think of compelling me to use force?'

'Try it.'

'You swear the jewels are with your bankers?'

'I left them in charge of my bankers, and they 've not been moved by me.'

'Well, it must be force.'

'Nothing short of it when the honour of our family 's concerned.'

It was rather worse than the anticipated struggle with this Charlotte, though he had kept his temper. The error was in supposing that an hour's sharp conflict would settle it, as he saw. The jewels required a siege.

'When does Eglett return?' he asked.

'Back to lunch. You stay and lunch here, Rowsley: we don't often have you.'

The earl contemplated her, measuring her powers of resistance for a prolonged engagement. Odd that the pride which had withdrawn him from the service of an offending country should pitch him into a series of tussles with women, for its own confusion! He saw that, too, in his dim reflectiveness, and held the country answerable for it.

Mr. Eglett was taken into confidence by him privately after lunch. Mr. Eglett's position between the brother and sister was perplexing; habitually he thought his wife had strong good sense, in spite of the costliness of certain actions at law not invariably confirming his opinion; he thought also that the earl's demand must needs be considered obediently. At the same time, his wife's objections to the new Countess of Ormont, unmasked upon the world, seemed very legitimate; though it might be asked why the earl should not marry, marrying the lady who pleased him. But if, in the words of his wife, the lady had no claim to be called a lady, the marriage was deplorable. On the other hand, Lord Ormont spoke of her in terms of esteem, and he was no fondling dotard.

How to compromise the matter for the sake of peace? The man perpetually plunged into strife by his combative spouse, cried the familiar question again; and at every suggestion of his on behalf of concord he heard from Lady Charlotte that he had no principles, or else from Lord Ormont that his head must be off his shoulders.

The man for peace had the smallest supply of language, and so, unless he took a side and fought, his active part was football between them.

It went on through the afternoon up to five o'clock. No impression was betrayed by Lady Charlotte.

She congratulated her brother on the recruit he had enlisted. He smiled his grimmest of the lips drawn in. A combat, perceptibly of some extension, would soon give him command of the man of peace; and energy to continue attacks will break down the energies of any dogged defensive stand.

He deferred the discussion with his unreasonable sister until the next day at half-past twelve o'clock.

Lady Charlotte nodded to the appointment. She would have congratulated herself without irony on the result of the first day's altercation but for her brother Rowsley's unusual and ominous display of patience.

Twice during the wrangle she had to conceal a difficult breathing. She felt a numbness in one arm now it was over, and mentally complimented her London physician on the unerringness of his diagnosis. Her heart, however, complained of the cruelty of having in the end, perhaps, if the wrangle should be protracted, to yield, for sheer weakness, without ceasing to beat.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ORMONT JEWELS

At half-past twelve of the noon next day Lord Ormont was at Lady Charlotte's house door. She welcomed him affectionately, as if nothing were in dispute; he nodded an acceptance of her greetings, with a blunt intimation of

the business to be settled; she put on her hump of the feline defensive; then his batteries opened fire and hers barked back on him. Each won admiration of the other's tenacity, all the more determined to sap or split it. They had known one another's character, but they had never seen it in such strong light. Never had their mutual and similar, though opposed, resources been drawn out so copiously and unreservedly. This was the shining scrawl of all that each could do to gain a fight. They admired one another's contemptibly justifiable evasions, changes of front, statements bordering the lie, even to meanness in the withdrawal of admissions and the denial of the same ever having been made. That was Charlotte! That was Rowsley! Anything to beat down the adversary.

As to will, the woman's will, of these two, equalled the man's. They were matched in obstinacy and unscrupulousness.

Her ingenuities of the defence eluded his attacks, and compelled him to fall on heavy iteration of his demand for the jewels, an immediate restitution of the jewels.

'Why immediate?' cried she.

He repeated it without replying to her.

'But, you tell me, Rowsley, why immediate? If you 're in want of money for her, you come to me, tell me, you shall have thousands. I 'll drive down to the City to-morrow and sell out stock. Mr. Eglett won't mind when he hears the purpose. I shall call five thousand cheap, and don't ask to see the money again.'

'Ah! double the sum to have your own way!' said he.

She protested that she valued her money. She furnished instances of her carefulness of her money all along up to the present period of brutal old age. Yet she would willingly part with five thousand or more

to save the family honour. Mr. Eglett would not only approve, he would probably advance a good part of the money himself.

'Money! Who wants money?' thundered the earl, and jumped out of her trap of the further diversion from the plain request. 'To-morrow, when I am here, I shall expect to have the jewels delivered to me.'

'That you may hand them over to her. Where are they likely to be this time next year? And what do you know about jewels? You may look at them when you ask to see them, and not know imitation paste—like the stuff Lady Beltus showed her old husband. Our mother wore them, and she prized them. I 'm not sure I wouldn't rather hear they were exhibited in a Bond Street jeweller's shop or a Piccadilly pawnbroker's than have them on that woman.'

'You speak of my wife.'

'For a season, perhaps; and off they 're likely to go, to pay bills, if her Adderwoods and her Morsfields are out of funds, as they call it.'

'You are aware you are speaking of my wife, Charlotte?'

'You daren't say my sister-in-law.'

He did not choose to say it; and once more she dared him. She could imagine she scored a point.

They were summoned to lunch by Mr. Eglett; and there was an hour's armistice; following which the earl demanded the restitution of the jewels, and heard the singular question, childishly accentuated, 'What for?'

Patience was his weapon and support, so he named his object with an air of inveteracy in tranquillity: they were for his wife to wear.

Lady Charlotte dared him to say they were for her sister-in-law.

He despised the transparent artifice of the challenge.

'But you have to own the difference,' she said. 'You haven't lost respect for your family, thank God! No. It 's one thing to say she 's a wife: you hang fire when it 's to say she 's my sister-in-law.'

'You 'll have to admit the fact, Charlotte.'

'How long is it since I should have had to admit the fact?'

'From the date of my marriage.'

'Tell me the date.'

'No, you don't wear a wig, Charlotte; but you are fit to practise in the Law-courts!' he said, exasperatedly jocular.

She had started a fresh diversion, and she pressed him for the date. 'I 'm supposed to have had a sister-in-law—how many weeks?—months?'

'Years.'

'Married years! And if you 've been married years, where were you married? Not in a church. That woman 's no church-bride.'

'There are some clever women made idiots of by their trullish tempers.'

'Abuse away. I 've asked you where you were married, Rowsley.'

'Go to Madrid. Go to the Embassy. Apply to the chaplain.'

'Married in Madrid! Who 's ever married in Madrid! You flung her a yellow handkerchief, and she tied it round her neck—that 's your ceremony! Now you tell me you 've been married years; and she 's a young woman; you fetch her over from Madrid, set her in a place where those Morsfields and other fungi-fellows grow, and she has to think herself lucky to be received by a Lady Staines and a Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, and she the talk of the town, refused at Court, for all an

honourable-enough old woman countenanced her in pity; and I 'm asked to believe she was my brother's wife, sister-in-law of mine, all the while! I won't.'

Lady Charlotte dilated on it for a length of time, merely to show she declined to believe it; pouring Morsfield over him and the talk of the town, the gypsy caught in Spain—now to be foisted on her as her sister-in-law! She could fancy she produced an effect.

She did indeed unveil to him a portion of the sufferings his Aminta had undergone; as visibly, too, the good argumentative reasons for his previous avoidance of the deadly, dismal wrangle here forced on him. A truly dismal, profitless wrangle! But the finish of it would be the beginning of some solace to his Aminta.

The finish of it must be to-morrow. He refrained from saying so, and simply appointed to-morrow for the resumption of the wrestle, departing in his invincible coat of patience: which one has to wear when dealing with a woman like Charlotte, he informed Mr. Eglett, on his way out at a later hour than on the foregone day. Mr. Eglett was of his opinion, that an introduction of lawyers into a family dispute was 'rats in the pantry'; and he would have joined him in his gloomy laugh, if the thought of Charlotte in a contention had not been so serious a matter. She might be beaten; she could not be brought to yield.

She retired to her bedroom, and laid herself flat on her bed, immoveable, till her maid undressed her for the night. A cup of broth and strip of toast formed her sole nourishment. As for her doctor's possible reproaches, the symptoms might crowd and do their worst; she fought for the honour of her family.

At midday of the third day Lady Charlotte was reduced to the condition of those fortresses which wave defiantly the flag, but deliver no further shot, awaiting

the assault. Her body, affected by hideous old age, succumbed. Her will was unshaken. She would not write to her bankers. Mr. Eglett might go to them, if he thought fit. Rowsley was to understand that he might call himself married; she would have no flower-basket bunch of a sister-in-law thrust upon her.

Lord Ormont and Mr. Eglett walked down to her bankers in the afternoon. As a consequence of express injunctions given by my lady five years previously, the assistant-manager sought an interview with her.

The jewels were lodged at her house the day ensuing. They were examined, verified by the list in Lady Charlotte's family record-book, and then taken away—forcibly, of course—by her brother.

He laughed in his dry manner; but the reminiscent glimpses, helping him to see the humour of it, stirred sensations of the tug it had been with that combative Charlotte, and excused him for having shrunk from the encounter until he conceived it to be necessary.

Settlement of the affair with Morsfield now claimed his attention. The ironical tolerance he practised in relation to Morsfield when Aminta had no definite station before the world changed to an angry irritability at the man's behaviour now that she had stepped forth under his acknowledgement of her as the Countess of Ormont. He had come round to a rather healthier mind regarding his country, and his introduction of the Countess of Ormont to the world was his peace-offering.

As he returned home earlier on the third day, he found his diligent secretary at work. The calling on Captain May and the writing to the sort of man were acts obnoxious to his dignity; so he despatched Weyburn to the captain's house, one in a small street of three narrow tenements abutting on aristocracy and terminating in mews. Weyburn's mission was to give the earl's

address at Great Marlow for the succeeding days, and to see Captain May, if the captain was at home. During his absence the precious family jewel-box was locked in safety. Aminta and her friend, little Miss Collett, were out driving, by the secretary's report. The earl considered it a wholesome feature of Aminta's character that she should have held to her modest schoolmate: the fact spoke well for both of them.

A look at the papers to serve for Memoirs was discomposing, and led him to think the secretary could be parted with as soon as he pleased to go: say, a week hence.

The Memoirs were no longer designed for issue. He had the impulse to treat them on the spot as the Plan for the Defence of the Country had been treated; and for absolutely obverse reasons. The secretary and the Memoirs were associated: one had sprung out of the other. Moreover, the secretary had witnessed a scene at Steignton. The young man had done his duty, and would be thanked for that, and dismissed, with a touch of his employer's hand. The young man would have made a good soldier—a better soldier, good as he might be as a scribe. He ought to have been in his father's footsteps, and he would then have disciplined or quashed his fantastical ideas. Perhaps he was right on the point of toning the Memoirs here and there. Since the scene at Steignton Lord Ormont's views had changed markedly in relation to everybody about him, and most things.

Weyburn came back at the end of an hour to say that he had left the address with Mrs. May, whom he had seen.

'A handsome person,' the earl observed.

'She must have been very handsome,' said Weyburn.

'Ah! we fall into their fictions, or life would be a bald business, upon my word!'

Lord Ormont had not uttered it before the sentiment of his greater luck with one of that queer world of the female lottery went through him on a swell of satisfaction, just a wave.

An old-world eye upon women, it seemed to Weyburn. But the man who could crown a long term of cruel injustice with the harshness to his wife at Steignton would naturally behold women with that eye.

However, he was allowed only to generalize; he could not trust himself to dwell on Lady Ormont and the Aminta inside the shell. Aminta and Lady Ormont might think as one or diversely of the executioner's blow she had undergone. She was a married woman, and she probably regarded the wedding by law as the end a woman has to aim at, and is annihilated by hitting; one flash of success, and then extinction, like a boy's cracker on the pavement. Not an elevated image, but closely resembling that which her alliance with Lord Ormont had been!

At the same time, no true lover of a woman advises her—imploring is horrible treason—to slip the symbolic circle of the law from her finger, and have in an instant the world for her enemy. She must consent to be annihilated, and must have no feelings; particularly no mind. The mind is the danger for her. If she has a mind alive, she will certainly push for the position to exercise it, and run the risk of a classing with Nature's created mates for reptile men.

Besides, Lady Ormont appeared, in the company of her friend Selina Collett, not worse than rather too thoughtful; not distinctly unhappy. And she was conversable, smiling. She might have had an explanation with my lord, accepting excuses—or, who knows? taking the blame, and offering them. Weakness is pliable. So pliable is it, that it has been known for a

crack of the masterly whip to fling off the victim and put on the culprit! Ay, but let it be as it may with Lady Ormont, Aminta is of a different composition. Aminta's eyes of the return journey to London were haunting lights, and lured him to speculate; and for her sake he rejected the thought that for him they meant anything warmer than the passing thankfulness, though they were a novel assurance to him of her possession beneath her smothering cloud of the power to resolve, and show forth a brilliant individuality.

The departure of the ladies and my lord in the travelling carriage for the house on the Upper Thames was passably sweetened to Weyburn by the command to him to follow in a day or two, and continue his work there until he left England. Aminta would not hear of an abandonment of the Memoirs. She spoke on the subject to my lord as to a husband pardoned.

She was not less affable and pleasant with him out of Weyburn's hearing. My lord earned her gratitude for his behaviour to Selina Collett, to whom he talked interestedly of her favourite pursuit, as he had done on the day when, as he was not the man to forget, her arrival relieved him of anxiety. Aminta noticed the box on the seat beside him.

They drove up to their country house in time to dress leisurely for dinner. Nevertheless, the dinner-hour had struck several minutes before she descended; and the earl, as if not expecting her, was out on the garden path beside the river bank with Selina. She beckoned from the step of the open French window.

He came to her at little Selina's shuffling pace, conversing upon water-plants.

'No jewelry to-day?' he said.

And Aminta replied: 'Carstairs has shown me the box and given the key. I have not opened it.'

'Time in the evening, or to-morrow. You guess the contents?'

'I presume I do.'

She looked feverish and shadowed.

He murmured kindly: 'Anything?'

'Not now: we will dine.'

She had missed, had lost, she feared, her own jewel-box; a casket of no great treasure to others, but of a largely estimable importance to her.

After the heavy ceremonial entrance and exit of dishes, she begged the earl to accompany her for an examination of the contents of the box.

As soon as her chamber-door was shut, she said, in accents of alarm: 'Mine has disappeared. Carstairs, I know, is to be trusted. She remembers carrying the box out of my room; she believes she can remember putting it into the fly. She had to confess that it had vanished, without her knowing how, when my boxes were unpacked.'

'Is she very much upset?' said the earl.

'Carstairs? Why, yes, poor creature! you can imagine. I have no doubt she feels for me; and her own reputation is concerned. What do you think is best to be done?'

'To be done! Overhaul the baggage again in all the rooms.'

'We 've not failed to do that.'

'Control yourself, my dear. If, by bad luck, they 're lost, we can replace them. The contents of this box, now, we could not replace. Open it, and judge.'

'I have no curiosity—forgive me, I beg. And the servant's fly has been visited, ransacked inside and out, footmen questioned; we have not left anything we can conceive of undone. My lord, will you suggest?'

'The intrinsic value of the gems would not be worth

—not worth Aminta's one beat of the heart. Upon my word—not one!'

An amatory knightly compliment breasting her perturbation roused an unwonted spite; and a swift reflection on it startled her with a suspicion. She cast it behind her. He could be angler and fish, he would not be cat and mouse.

She said, however, more temperately: 'It is not the value of the gems. We are losing precious minutes!'

'Association of them with the giver? Is it that? If that has a value for you, he is flattered.'

This betrayed him to the woman waxing as intensely susceptible in all her being as powder to sparks.

'There is to be no misunderstanding, my lord,' she said. 'I like—I value my jewels; but—I am alarmed lest the box should fall into hands——into strange hands.'

'The box!' he exclaimed with an outline of a comic grimace; and, if proved a voluptuary in torturing, he could instance half a dozen points for extenuation: her charm of person, withheld from him, and to be embraced; her innocent naughtiness; compensation coming to her in excess for a transient infliction of pain. 'Your anxiety is about the box?'

'Yes, the box,' Aminta said firmly. 'It contains——'

'No false jewels? A thief might complain.'

'It contains letters, my lord.'

'Blackmail?'

'You would be at liberty to read them. I would rather they were burnt.'

'Ah!' The earl heaved his chest prodigiously. 'Blackmail letters are better in a husband's hands, if they can be laid there.'

'If there is a necessity for him to read them—yes.'

'There may be a necessity, there can't be a gratification,—though there are dogs of thick blood that like to scratch their sores,' he murmured to himself. 'You used to show me these declaration epistles.'

'Not the names.'

'Not the names—no!'

'When we had left the country, I showed you why it had been my wish to go.'

'Xarifa was and is female honour. Take the key, open that box; I will make inquiries. But, my dear, you guess everything. Your little box was removed for the bigger impression to be produced by this one.'

A flash came out of her dark eyes.

'No, you guess wrong this time, you clever shrew! I wormed nothing from you,' said he. 'I knew you kept particular letters in that receptacle of things of price: Aminta can't conceal. The man has worried you. Why not have come to me?'

'Oblige me, my lord, by restoring me my box.'

'This is your box.'

Her bosom lifted with the words Oh, no! unspoken.

He took the key and opened the box. A dazzling tray of stones was revealed; underneath it the constellations in cases, very heavens for the worldly Eve; and he doubted that Eve could have gone completely out of her. But she had, as observation instructed him, set her woman's mind on something else, and must have it before letting her eyes fall on objects impossible for any of her sex to see without coveting them.

He bowed. 'I will fetch it,' he said magnanimously.

Her own box was brought from his room. She then consented to look womanly at the Ormont jewels, over which the battle, whereof she knew nothing, and nothing could be told her, had been fought in her interests, for her sovereign pleasure.

She looked and admired. They were beautiful jewels: the great emerald was wonderful, and there were two rubies to praise. She excused herself for declining to put the circlet for the pendant round her neck, or a glittering ring on her finger. Her remarks were encomiums, not quite so cold as those of a provincial spinster of an ascetic turn at an exhibition of the world's flycatcher gewgaws. He had divided Aminta from the Countess of Ormont, and it was the wary Aminta who set a guard on looks and tones before the spectacle of his noble bounty, lest any, the smallest, payment of the dues of the countess should be demanded. Rightly interpreting him to be by nature incapable of asking pardon, or acknowledging a wrong done by him, however much he might crave exemption from blame and seek for peace, she kept to her mask of injury, though she hated unforgivingness; and she felt it little, she did it easily, because her heart was dead to the man.

My lord's hand touched her on her shoulder, propitiatingly in some degree, in his dumb way.

Offended women can be emotional to a towering pride, that bends while it assumes unbendingness: it must come to their sensations, as it were a sign of humanity in the majestic, speechless king of beasts; and they are pathetically melted, abjectly hypocritical; a nice confusion of sentiments, traceable to a tender bosom's appreciation of strength and the perceptive compassion for its mortality.

In a case of the alienated wife, whose blood is running another way, no foul snake's bite is more poisonous than that indicatory touch, however simple and slight. My lord's hand, lightly laid on Aminta's shoulder, became sensible of soft warm flesh stiffening to the skeleton.

CHAPTER XXIV

LOVERS MATED

He was benevolently martial, to the extent of paternal, in thinking his girl, of whom he deigned to think now as his countess, pardonably foolish. Woman for woman, she was of a pattern superior to the world's ordinary, and might run the world's elect a race. But she was pitifully woman-like in her increase of dissatisfaction with the more she got. Women are happier enslaved. Men, too, if their despot is an Ormont. Colonel of his regiment, he proved that: his men would follow him anywhere, do anything. Grand old days, before he was condemned by one knows not what extraordinary round of circumstances to cogitate on women as fluids, and how to cut channels for them, that they may course along in the direction good for them, imagining it their pretty wanton will to go that way! Napoleon's treatment of women is excellent example. Peterborough's can be defended.

His Aminta could not reason. She nursed a rancour on account of the blow she drew on herself at Steignton, and she declined consolation in her being pardoned. The reconcilement evidently was proposed as a finale of one of the detestable feminine storms enveloping men weak enough to let themselves be dragged through a scene for the sake of domestic tranquillity.

A remarkable exhibition of Aminta the woman was, her entire change of front since he had taken her spousal chill. Formerly she was passive, merely stately, the chiselled *grande dame,* deferential in her bearing and speech, even when argumentative and having an opinion

to plant. She had always the independent eye and step; she now had the tongue of the graceful and native great lady, fitted to rule her circle and hold her place beside the proudest of the Ormonts. She bore well the small shuffle with her jewel-box—held herself gallantly. There had been no female feignings either, affected misapprehensions, gapy ignorances, and snaky subterfuges, and the like, familiar to men who have the gentle twister in grip. Straight on the line of the thing to be seen she flew, and struck on it; and that is a woman's martial action. He would right heartily have called her comrade, if he had been active himself. A warrior pulled off his horse, to sit in a chair and contemplate the minute evolutions of the sex is pettish with his part in such battle-fields at the stage beyond amusement.

Seen swimming, she charmed him. Abstract views of a woman summon opposite advocates: one can never say positively, That is she! But the visible fair form of a woman is hereditary queen of us. We have none of your pleadings and counter-pleadings and judicial summaries to obstruct a ravenous loyalty. My lord beheld Aminta take her three quick steps on the plank, and spring and dive and ascend, shaking the ends of her bound black locks; and away she went with shut mouth and broad stroke of her arms into the sunny early morning river; brave to see, although he had to flick a bee of a question, why he enjoyed the privilege of seeing, and was not beside her. The only answer confessed to a distaste for an exercise once pleasurable.

She and her little friend boated or strolled through the meadows during the day; he fished. When he and Aminta rode out for the hour before dinner, she seemed pleased. She was amicable, conversable, all that was agreeable as a woman, and she was the chillest of wives. My lord's observations and reflections came to one

conclusion: she pricked and challenged him to lead up to her desired stormy scene. He met her and meant to vanquish her with the dominating patience Charlotte had found too much for her: women cannot stand against it.

To be patient in contention with women, however, one must have a continuous and an exclusive occupation; and the tax it lays on us conduces usually to impatience with men. My lord did not directly connect Aminta's chillness and Morsfield's impudence; yet the sensation roused by his Aminta participated in the desire to punish Morsfield speedily. Without wishing for a duel, he was moved by the social sanction it had to consider whether green youths and women might not think a grey head had delayed it too long. The practice of the duel begot the peculiar animal logic of the nobler savage, which tends to magnify an offence in the ratio of our vanity, and hunger for a blood that is not demanded by the appetite. Moreover, a waning practice, in disfavour with the new generation, will be commended to the conservative barbarian, as partaking of the wisdom of his fathers. Further, too, we may have grown slothful, fallen to moodiness, done excess of service to Omphale, our tyrant lady of the glow and the chill; and then undoubtedly the duel braces.

He left Aminta for London, submissive to the terms of intimacy dictated by her demeanour, his unacknowledged seniority rendering their harshness less hard to endure. She had not gratified him with a display of her person in the glitter of the Ormont jewels; and since he was, under common conditions, a speechless man, his ineptitude for amorous remonstrances precipitated him upon deeds, that he might offer additional proofs of his esteem and the assurance of her established position as his countess. He proposed to engage Lady Charlotte in

a conflict severer than the foregoing, until he brought her to pay the ceremonial visit to her sister-in-law. The count of time for this final trial of his masterfulness he calculated at a week. It would be an occupation, miserable occupation though it was. He hailed the prospect of chastising Morsfield, for a proof that his tussels with women, prolonged study of their tricks, manœuvrings and outwittings of them, had not emasculated him.

Aminta willingly promised to write from day to day. Her senses had his absence insured to them by her anticipation of the task. She did not conceive it would be so ponderous a task. What to write to him when nothing occurred! Nothing did occur, unless the arrival of Mr. Weyburn was to be named an event. She alluded to it: 'Mr. Weyburn has come, expecting to find you here. The dispatch-box is here. Is he to await you?'

That innocent little question was a day gained.

One day of boating on the upper reaches of the pastoral river, and walks in woods and golden meadows, was felicity fallen on earth, the ripe fruit of dreams. A dread surrounded it, as a belt, not shadowing the horizon; and she clasped it to her heart the more passionately, like a mother her rosy infant, which a dark world threatens and the universal fate.

Love, as it will be at her June of life, was teaching her to know the good and bad of herself. Women, educated to embrace principles through their timidity and their pudency, discover, amazed, that these are not lasting qualities under love's influence. The blushes and the fears take flight. The principles depend much on the beloved. Is he a man whose contact with the world has given him understanding of life's laws, and can hold him firm to the right course in the strain and whirling of

a torrent, they cling to him, deeply they worship. And if they tempt him, it is not advisedly done. Nature and love are busy in conjunction. The timidities and pudencies have flown; they may hover, they are not present. You deplore it, you must not blame; you have educated them so. Muscular principles are sown only out in the world; and, on the whole, with all their errors, the worldly men are the truest as well as the bravest of men. Her faith in his guidance was equal to her dependence. The retrospect of a recent journey told her how he had been tried.

She could gaze tenderly, betray her heart, and be certain of safety. Can wine match that for joy? She had no schemes, no hopes, but simply the desire to bestow, the capacity to believe. Any wish to be enfolded by him was shapeless and unlighted, unborn; though now and again for some chance word or undefined thought she surprised the strange tenant of her breast at an incomprehensibly faster beat, and knew it for her own and not her own, the familiar the stranger —an utter stranger, as one who had snared her in a wreath and was pulling her off her feet.

She was not so guileless at the thought of little Selina Collett here, and of Selina as the letter-bearer of old; and the marvel that Matey and Browny and Selina were together after all! Was it not a kind of summons to her to call him Matey just once, only once, in play? She burned and ached to do it. She might have taxed her ingenuity successfully to induce little Selina to the boldness of calling him Matey; and she then repeating it, as the woman who revived with a meditative effort recollections of the girl. Ah, frightful hypocrite! Thoughts of the pleasure of his name aloud on her lips in his hearing dissolved through her veins, and were met by Matthew Weyburn's open face, before which hypocrisy

stood rent and stripped. She preferred the calmer, the truer pleasure of seeing him modestly take lessons in the nomenclature of weeds, herbs, grasses, by hedge and ditch. Selina could instruct him as well in entomology, but he knew better the Swiss, Tyrolese, and Italian valley-homes of beetle and butterfly species. Their simple talk was a cool zephyr fanning Aminta.

The suggestion to unite the two came to her, of course, but their physical disparity denied her that chance to settle her own difficulty, and a whisper of one physically the match for him punished her. In stature, in healthfulness, they were equals, perhaps: not morally or intellectually. And she could claim headship of him on one little point confided to her by his mother, who was bearing him, and startled by the boom of guns under her pillow, when her husband fronted the enemy: Matthew Weyburn, the fencer, boxer, cricketer, hunter, all things manly, rather shrank from firearms—at least, one saw him put on a screw to manipulate them. In danger—among brigands or mutineers, for example—she could stand by him and prove herself his mate. Intellectually, morally, she had to bow humbly. Nor had she, nor could she do more than lean on and catch example from his prompt spiritual valiancy. It shone out from him, and a crisis fulfilled the promise. Who could be his mate for cheerful courage, for skill, the ready mind, easy adroitness, and for self-command? To imitate was a woman's utmost.

Matthew Weyburn appeared the very Matey of the first of May cricketing day among Cuper's boys the next morning, when seen pacing down the garden-walk. He wore his white trousers of that happiest of old days—the 'white ducks' Aminta and Selina remembered. Selina beamed. 'Yes, he did; he always wore them; but now it 's a frock-coat instead of a jacket.'

'But now he will be a master instead of a schoolboy,' said Aminta. 'Let us hope he will prosper.'

'He gives me the idea of a man who must succeed,' Selina said; and she was patted, rallied, asked how she had the idea, and kissed; Aminta saying she fancied it might be thought, for he looked so confident.

'Only not what the boys used to call "cocky,"' said Selina. 'He won't be contemptuous of those he outstrips.'

'His choice of the schoolmaster's profession points to a modesty in him, does it not, little woman?'

'He made me tell him, while you were writing your letters yesterday, all about my brother and his prospects.'

'Yes, that is like him. And I must hear of your brother, "little Collett." Don't forget, Sely, little Collett was our postman.'

The Countess of Ormont's humorous reference to the circumstance passed with Selina for a sign of a poetic love of the past, and a present social elevation that allowed her to review it impassively. She admired the great lady and good friend who could really be interested in the fortunes of a mere schoolmaster and a merchant's clerk. To her astonishment, by some agency beyond her fathoming, she found herself, and hardly for her own pleasure, pushing the young schoolmaster animatedly to have an account of his aims in the establishment of the foreign school.

Weyburn smiled. He set a short look at Aminta; and she, conscious of her detected diplomacy, had an inward shiver, mixed of the fascination and repugnance felt by a woman who knows that under one man's eyes her character is naked and anatomized. Her character? —her soul. He held it in hand and probed it mercifully. She had felt the sweet sting again and again, and had shrunk from him, and had crawled to him. The love of

him made it all fascination. How did he learn to read at any moment right to the soul of a woman? Did experience teach him, or sentimental sympathy? He was too young, he was too manly. It must be because of his being in heart and mind the brother to the sister with women.

Thames played round them on his pastoral pipes. Bee-note and woodside blackbird and meadow cow, and the leap of the fish of the silver rolling rings, composed the music.

She gave her mind to his voice, following whither it went; half was in air, higher than the swallow's, exalting him.

How is it he is the brother of women? They are sisters for him because he is neither sentimentalist nor devourer. He will not flatter to feed on them. The one he chooses, she will know love. There are women who go through life not knowing love. They are inanimate automatic machines, who lay them down at last, inquiring wherefore they were caused to move. She is not of that sad flock. She will be mated; she will have the right to call him Matey. A certain Browny called him Matey. She lived and died. A certain woman apes Browny's features and inherits her passion, but has forfeited her rights. Were she, under happiest conditions, to put her hand in his, shame would burn her. For he is just—he is Justice; and a woman bringing him less than his due, she must be a creature of the slime!

This was the shadowy sentiment that made the wall of division between them. There was no other. Lord Ormont had struck to fragments that barrier of the conventional oath and ceremonial union. He was unjust—he was Injustice. The weak may be wedded, they cannot be married, to Injustice. And if we have the world for the buttress of injustice, then is Nature the

flaring rebel; there is no fixed order possible. Laws are necessary instruments of the majority; but when they grind the sane human being to dust for their maintenance, their enthronement is the rule of the savage's old deity, sniffing blood-sacrifice. There cannot be a based society upon such conditions. An immolation of the naturally-constituted individual arrests the general expansion to which we step, decivilizes more, and is more impious to the God in man, than temporary revelries of a licence that Nature soon checks.

Arrows of thoughts resembling these shot over the half of Aminta's mind not listening. Her lover's head was active on the same theme while he spoke. They converged to it from looks crossing or catching profiles, or from tones, from a motion of hand, from a chance word. Insomuch that the third person present was kept unobservant only by her studious and humble speculations on the young schoolmaster's grand project to bring the nationalities together, and teach Old England to the Continent—the Continent to Old England: our healthy games, our scorn of the lie, manliness; their intellectual valour, diligence, considerate manners.

'Just to name a few of the things for interchange,' said Weyburn. 'As to method, we shall be their disciples. But I look forward to our fellows getting the lead. No hurry. Why will they? you ask *in petto*. Well, they 're emulous, and they take a thrashing kindly. That 's the way to learn a lesson. I 've seen our fellows beaten and beaten—never the courage beaten out of them. In the end, they won and kept the field. They have a lot to learn—principally not to be afraid of ideas. They lose heaps of time before they can feel at home with ideas. They call themselves practical for having an addiction to the palpable. It is a pretty wreath they clap on their deficiencies. Practical dogs are for bones,

horses for corn. I want the practical Englishman to settle his muzzle in a nosebag of ideas. When he has once got hold of them, he makes good stuff of them. On the Continent ideas have wings and pay visits. Here, they 're stay-at-home. Then I want our fellows to have the habit of speaking from the chest. They shall return to England with the whoop of the mountains in them and ready to jump out. They shall have an Achillean roar; and they shall sing by second nature. Don't fear: they 'll give double for anything they take. I 've known Italians, to whom an Englishman's honesty of mind and dealing was one of the dreams of a better humanity they had put in a box. Frenchmen, too, who, when they came to know us, were astonished at their epithet of *perfide*, and loved us.'

'Emile,' said Aminta. 'You remember Emile, Selina: the dear little French boy at Mr. Cuper's?'

'Oh, I do,' Selina responded.

'He will work with Mr. Weyburn in Switzerland.'

'Oh, that will be nice!' the girl exclaimed.

Aminta squeezed Selina's hand. A shower of tears clouded her eyes. She chose to fancy it was because of her envy of the modest, busy, peaceful girl, who envied none. Ἔρως ἀνίκατε μάχαν, conquers also sincerity in the sincerest. She was vexed with her full breast, and had as little command of her thoughts as of her feelings.'

'Mr. Weyburn has ideas for the education of girls too,' she said.

'There 's the task,' said he. 'It 's to separate them as little as possible. All the—*passez-moi le mot*—devilry between the sexes begins at their separation. They 're foreigners when they meet; and their alliances are not always binding. The chief object in life, if happiness be the aim, and the growing better than we are, is to

teach men and women how to be one; for, if they 're not, then each is a morsel for the other to prey on. Lady Charlotte Eglett's view is, that the greater number of them on both sides hate one another.'

'Hate!' exclaimed Selina; and Aminta said: 'Is Lady Charlotte Eglett an authority?'

'She has observed, and she thinks. She has in the abstract the justest of minds: and that is the curious point about her. But one may say they are trained at present to be hostile. Some of them fall in love and strike a truce, and still they are foreigners. They have not the same standard of honour. They might have it from an education in common.'

'But there must be also a lady to govern the girls?' Selina interposed.

'Ah, yes; she is not yet found!'

'Would it increase their mutual respect?—or show of respect, if you like?' said Aminta, with his last remark at work as the shattering bell of a city's insurrection in her breast.

'In time, under management; catching and grouping them young. A boy who sees a girl do what he can't, and would like to do, won't take refuge in his muscular superiority—which, by the way, would be lessened.'

'You suppose their capacities are equal?'

'Things are not equal. I suppose their excellencies to make a pretty nearly equal sum in the end. But we 're not weighing them each. The question concerns the advantage of both.'

'That seems just!'

Aminta threw no voice into the word 'just.' It was the word of the heavens assuaging earth's thirst, and she was earth to him. Her soul yearned to the man whose mind conceived it.

She said to Selina: 'We must plan an expedition

next year or the year after, and see how the school progresses.'

All three smiled; and Selina touched and held Aminta's hand shyly. Visions of the unseen Switzerland awed her.

Weyburn named the Spring holiday time, the season of the flowering Alpine robes. He promised welcome, pressed for a promise of the visit. Warmly it was given. 'We will; we will indeed!'

'I shall look forward,' he said.

There was nothing else for him or for her, except to doat on the passing minute that slipped when seized. The looking forward turned them to the looking back at the point they had flown from, and yielded a momentary pleasure, enough to stamp some section of a picture on their memories, which was not the burning *now* Love lives for, in the clasp, if but of hands. Desire of it destroyed it. They swung to the future, swung to the present it made the past, sensible to the quick of the *now* they could not hold. They were lovers. Divided lovers in presence, they thought and they felt in pieces. Feelings and thoughts were forbidden to speech. She dared look the very little of her heart's fulness, without the disloyalty it would have been in him to let a small peep of his heart be seen. While her hand was not clasped she could look tenderly, and her fettered state, her sense of unworthiness muffled in the deeps, would keep her from the loosening to passion.

He who read through her lustrous, transiently dwelling eyes had not that security. His part, besides the watch over the spring of his hot blood, was to combat a host, insidious among which was unreason calling her Browny, urging him to take his own, to snatch her from a possessor who forfeited by undervaluing her. This was the truth in a better-ordered world: she belonged to

the man who could help her to grow and to do her work. But in the world we have around us, it was the distorted truth: and keeping passion down, he was able to wish her such happiness as pertained to safety from shipwreck, and for himself, that he might continue to walk in the ranks of the sober citizens.

Oh, true and right, but she was gloriously beautiful! Day by day she surpassed the wondrous Browny of old days. All women were eclipsed by her. She was that fire in the night which lights the night and draws the night to look at it. And more: this queen of women was beginning to have a mind at work. One saw already the sprouting of a mind repressed. She had a distinct ability; the good ambition to use her qualities. She needed life and air—that is, comprehension of her, encouragement, the companion mate. With what strength would she now endow him! The pride in the sharp imagination of possessing her whispered a boast of the strength her mate would have from her. His need and her need rushed together somewhere down the skies. They could not, he argued, be separated eternally.

He had to leave her. Selina, shocked at a boldness she could not understand in herself, begged him to stay and tell her of Switzerland and Alpine flowers and herbs, and the valleys for the gold beetle and the Apollo butterfly. Aminta hinted that Lord Ormont might expect to find him there, if he came the next morning; but she would not try to persuade, and left the decision with him, loving him for the pain he inflicted by going.

Why, indeed, should he stay? Both could ask; they were one in asking. Anguish balanced pleasure in them both. The day of the pleasure was heaven to remember, heaven to hope for; not so heavenly to pray for. The praying for it, each knew, implored their joint will to

decree the perilous blessing. A shadowy sentiment of duty and rectitude, born of what they had suffered, hung between them and the prayer for a renewal, that would renew the tempting they were conscious of when the sweet, the strained, throbbing day was over. They could hope for chance to renew it, and then they would be irresponsible. Then they would think and wish discreetly, so as to have it a happiness untainted. In refusing now to take another day or pray for it, they deserved that chance should grant it.

Aminta had said through Selina the utmost her self-defences could allow. But the idea of a final parting cut too cruelly into her life, and she murmured: 'I shall see you before you go for good?'

'I will come, here or in London.'

'I can trust?'

'Quite certain.'

A meeting of a few hasty minutes involved none of the dangers of a sunny, long summer day; and if it did, the heart had its claims, the heart had its powers of resistance. Otherwise we should be base verily.

He turned on a bow to leave her before there was a motion for the offer of her hand.

After many musings and frettings, she reached the wisdom of that. Wisdom was her only nourishment now. A cold, lean dietary it is; but he dispensed it, and it fed her, or kept her alive. It became a proud feeling that she had been his fellow in the achievement of a piece of wisdom; though the other feeling, that his hand's kind formal touching, without pressure of hers, would have warmed her to go through the next interview with her lord, mocked at pure satisfaction. Did he distrust himself? Or was it to spare her? But if so, her heart was quite bare to him! But she knew it was.

Aminta drove her questioning heart as a vessel across blank circles of sea, where there was nothing save the solitary heart for answer. It answered intelligibly and comfortingly at last, telling her of proof given that she could repose under his guidance with absolute faith. Was ever loved woman more blest than she in such belief? She had it firmly; and a blessedness, too, in this surety wavering beneath shadows of the uncertainty. Her eyes knew it, her ears were empty of the words. Her heart knew it, and it was unconfirmed by reason. As for his venturing to love her, he feared none. And no sooner did that reflection surge than she stood up beside him in revolt against her lion and lord. Her instinct judged it impossible she could ever have yielded her heart to a man lacking courage. Hence—what? when cowardice appeared as the sole impediment to happiness now!

He had gone, and the day lived again for both of them —a day of sheer gold in the translation from troubled earth to the mind. One another's beauty through the visage into the character was newly perceived and worshipped; and the beauties of pastoral Thames, the temple of peace, hardly noticed in the passing of the day—taken as air to the breather; until some chip of the scene, round which an emotion had curled, was vivid foreground and gateway to shrouded romance: it might be the stream's white face browning into willow-droopers, or a wagtail on a water-lily leaf, or the fore-horse of an up-river barge at strain of legs, a red-finned perch hung a foot above the pebbles in sun-veined depths, a kingfisher on the scud under alders, the forest of the bank-side weeds.

CHAPTER XXV

PREPARATIONS FOR A RESOLVE

THAT day receded like a spent billow, and lapsed among the others advancing, but it left a print deeper than events would have stamped. Aminta's pen declined to run to her lord; and the dipping it in ink was no acceleration of the process. A sentence, bearing likeness to an artless infant's trot of the half-dozen steps to mother's lap, stumbled upon the full stop midway. Desperate determination pushed it along, and there was in consequence a dead stop at the head of the next sentence. A woman whose nature is insurgent against the majesty of the man to whom she must, among the singular injunctions binding her, regularly write, sees no way between hypocrisy and rebellion. For rebellion, she, with the pen in her hand, is avowedly not yet ripe, hypocrisy is abominable.

If she abstained from writing, he might travel down to learn the cause; a similar danger, or worse, haunted the writing frigidly. She had to be the hypocrite or else—leap.

But an honest woman who is a feeling woman, when she consents to play hypocrite, cannot do it by halves. From writing a short cold letter, Aminta wrote a short warm one, or very friendly. Length she could avoid, because she was unable to fill a page. It seemed that she could not compose a friendly few lines without letting her sex be felt in them. What she had put away from her, so as not to feel it herself, the simulation of ever so small a bit of feeling brought prominently back; and where she had made a cast for flowing independent

simplicity, she was feminine, ultra-feminine to her reading of it.

Better take the leap than be guilty of double-dealing even on paper! The nature of the leap she did not examine.

Her keen apprehension of the price payable for his benevolent intentions caught scent of them in the air. Those Ormont jewels shone as emblems of a detested subjection, the penalty for being the beautiful woman rageing men proclaimed. Was there no scheme of some other sort, and far less agreeable, to make amends for Steignton? She was shrewd at divination; she guessed her lord's design. Rather than meet Lady Charlotte, she proposed to herself the 'leap' immediately; knowing it must be a leap in the dark, hoping it might be into a swimmer's water. She had her own pin-money income, and she loathed the chain of her title. So the leap would at least be honourable, as it assuredly would be unregretted, whatever ensued.

While Aminta's heart held on to this debate, and in her bed, in her boat, across the golden valley meadows beside her peaceful little friend, she gathered a gradual resolution without sight of agencies or consequences, Lord Ormont was kept from her by the struggle to master his Charlotte a second time—compared with which the first was insignificant. And this time it was curious: he could not subdue her physique, as he did before; she was ready for him each day, and she was animated, much more voluble, she was ready to jest. The reason being, that she fought now on plausibly good grounds: on behalf of her independent action.

Previously, her intelligence of the ultimate defeat hanging over the mere stubborn defence of a weak position had harassed her to death's door. She had no right to retain the family jewels; she had the most

perfect of established rights to refuse doing an ignominious thing. She refused to visit the so-called Countess of Ormont, or leave her card, or take one step to warrant the woman in speaking of her as her sister-in-law. And no,—it did not signify that her brother Rowsley was prohibited by her from marrying whom he pleased. It meant, that to judge of his acts as those of a reasoning man, he would have introduced his wife to his relatives —the relatives he had not quarrelled with—immediately upon his marriage unless he was ashamed of the woman; and a wife he was ashamed of was no sister-in-law for her nor aunt for her daughters. Nor should she come playing the Black Venus among her daughters' husbands, Lady Charlotte had it in her bosom to say additionally.

Lord Ormont was disconcerted by her manifest pleasure in receiving him every day. Evidently she consented to the recurrence of a vexatious dissension for the enjoyment of having him with her hourly. Her dialectic, too, was cunning. Impetuous with meaning, she forced her way to get her meaning out, in a manner effective to strike her blow. Anything for a diversion or a triumph of the moment! He made no way. She was the better fencer at the tongue.

Yet there was not any abatement of her deference to her brother; and this little misunderstanding put aside, he was the Rowsley esteemed by her as the chief of men. She foiled him, it might seem, to exalt him the more. After he had left the house, visibly annoyed and somewhat stupefied, she talked of him to her husband, of the soul of chivalry Rowsley was, the loss to his country. Mr. Eglett was a witness to one of the altercations, when she, having as usual the dialectical advantage, praised her brother, to his face, for his magnanimous nature; regretting only that it could be said he was weak

on the woman side of him—which was, she affirmed, a side proper to every man worth the name; but in his case his country might complain. Of what?—Well, of a woman.—What had she done, for the country to complain of her?—Why, then, arts or graces, she had bewitched and weaned him from his public duty, his military service, his patriotic ambition.

Lord Ormont's interrogations, heightening the effect of Charlotte's charge, appeared to Mr. Eglett as a giving of himself over into her hands; but the earl, after a minute of silence, proved he was a tricky combatant. It was he who had drawn on Charlotte, that he might have his opportunity to eulogize—'this lady, whom you continue to call the woman, after I have told you she is my wife.' According to him, her appeals, her entreaties, that he should not abandon his profession or let his ambition rust, had been at one period constant.

He spoke fervently, for him eloquently; and he gained his point; he silenced Lady Charlotte's tongue, and impressed Mr. Eglett.

When the latter and his wife were alone, he let her see that the Countess of Ormont was becoming a personage in his consideration.

Lady Charlotte cried out: 'Hear these men where it 's a good-looking woman between the winds! Do you take anything Rowsley says for earnest? You ought to know he stops at no trifle to get his advantage over you in a dispute. That 's the soldier in him. It 's victory at any cost!—and I like him for it. Do you tell me you think it possible my brother Rowsley would keep smothered years under a bushel the woman he can sit here magnifying—because he wants to lime you and me: you to take his part, and me to go and call the noble creature decked out in his fine fiction my sister-in-

law. Nothing 'll tempt me to believe my brother could behave in such a way to the woman he respected!'

So Mr. Eglett opined. But he had been impressed.

He relieved his mind on the subject in a communication to Lord Adderwood; who habitually shook out the contents of his to Mrs. Lawrence Finchley; and she, deeming it good for Aminta to have information of the war waging for her behoof, obtained her country address, with the resolve to drive down, a bearer of good news to the dear woman she liked to think of, look at, and occasionally caress; besides rather tenderly pitying her, now that a change of fortune rendered her former trials conspicuous.

An incident, considered grave even in the days of the duel and the kicks against a swelling public reprehension of the practice, occurred to postpone her drive for four-and-twenty hours. London was shaken by rumours of a tragic mishap to a socially well-known gentleman at the Chiallo fencing-rooms. The rumours passing from mouth to mouth acquired, in the nature of them, sinister colours as they circulated. Lord Ormont sent Aminta word of what he called 'a bad sort of accident at Chiallo's,' without mentioning names or alluding to suspicions.

He treated it lightly. He could not have written of it with such unconcern if it involved the secretary! Yet Aminta did seriously ask herself whether he could; and she flew rapidly over the field of his character, seizing points adverse, points favourably advocative, balancing dubiously—most unjustly: she felt she was unjust. But in her condition, the heart of a woman is instantly planted in jungle when the spirits of the two men closest to her are made to stand opposed by a sudden excitement of her fears for the beloved one. She cannot see widely, and is one of the wild while the fit lasts; and, after it, that savage narrow vision she had of the

unbeloved retains its vivid print in permanence. Was she unjust? Aminta cited corroboration of her being accurate: such was Lord Ormont! and although his qualities of gallantry, courtesy, integrity, honourable gentleman, presented a fair low-level account on the other side, she had so stamped his massive selfishness and icy inaccessibility to emotion on her conception of him that the repulsive figure formed by it continued towering when her mood was kinder.

Love played on love in the woman's breast. Her love had taken a fever from her lord's communication of the accident at Chiallo's, and she pushed her alarm to imagine the deadliest, and plead for the right of confession to herself of her unrepented regrets. She and Matey Weyburn had parted without any pressure of hands, without a touch. They were, then, unplighted if now the grave divided them! No touch: mere glances! And she sighed not, as she pleaded, for the touch, but for the plighting it would have been. If now she had lost him, he could never tell herself that since the dear old buried and night-walking schooldays she had said once *Matey* to him, named him once to his face Matey Weyburn. A sigh like the roll of a great wave breaking against a wall of rock came from her for the possibly lost chance of naming him to his face Matey, —oh, and seeing his look as she said it!

The boldness might be fancied: it could not be done. Agreeing with the remote inner voice of her reason so far, she toned her exclamatory foolishness to question, in Reason's plain, deep, *basso-profundo* accompaniment tone, how much the most blessed of mortal women could do to be of acceptable service to a young schoolmaster?

There was no reply to the question. But it became a nestling centre for the skiey flock of dreams, and for really temperate soundings of her capacities, tending to

the depreciatory. She could do little. She entertained the wish to work, not only 'for the sake of Somebody,' as her favourite poet sang, but for the sake of working and serving—proving that she was helpfuller than a Countess of Ormont, ranged with all the other countesses in china and Dresden on a drawing-room mantelpiece for show. She could organize, manage a household, manage people too, she thought: manage a husband? The word offends. Perhaps invigorate him, here and there perhaps inspire him, if he would let her breathe. Husbands exist who refuse the right of breathing to their puppet wives. Above all, as it struck her, she could assist, and be more than an echo of one nobler, in breathing manliness, high spirit, into boys. With that idea she grazed the shallows of reality, and her dreams whirred from the nest and left it hungrily empty.

Selina Collett was writing under the verandah letters to her people in Suffolk, performing the task with marvellous ease. Aminta noted it as a mark of superior ability, and she had the envy of the complex nature observing the simple. It accused her of some guiltiness, uncommitted and indefensible. She had pushed her anxiety about 'the accident at Chiallo's' to an extreme that made her the creature of her sensibilities. In the midst of this quiet country life and landscape, these motionless garden flowers headed by the smooth white river, and her gentle little friend so homely here, the contemplation of herself was like a shriek in music. Worse than discordant, she pronounced herself inferior, unfit mentally as well as bodily for the dreams of companionship with any noble soul who might have the dream of turning her into something better. There are couples in the world, not coupled by priestly circumstance, who are close to the true union, by reason of generosity on the one part, grateful devotion, as for the

gift of life, on the other. For instance, Mrs. Lawrence Finchley and Lord Adderwood, which was an instance without resemblance; but Aminta's heart beat thick for what it wanted, and they were the instance of two that did not have to snap false bonds of a marriage-tie in order to walk together composedly outside it—in honour? Oh yes, yes! She insisted on believing it was in honour.

She saw the couple issue from the boathouse. She had stepped into the garden full of a presentiment; so she fancied, the moment they were seen. She had, in fact, heard a noise in the boathouse while thinking of them, and the effect on her was to spring an idea of mysterious interventions at the sight.

Mrs. Lawrence rushed to her, and was embraced.

'You 're not astonished to see me? Adder drove me down, and stopped his coach at the inn, and rowed me the half-mile up. We will lunch, if you propose; but presently. My dear, I have to tell you things. You have heard?'

'The accident?'

Aminta tried to read in Mrs. Lawrence's eyes whether it closely concerned her.

Those pretty eyes, their cut of lids hinting at delicate affinities with the rice-paper lady of the the court of China, were trying to peer seriously.

'Poor man! One must be sorry for him: he——'

'Who?'

'You 've not heard, then?' Mrs. Lawrence dropped her voice: 'Morsfield.'

Aminta shivered. 'All I have heard—half a line from my lord this morning: no name. It was at the fencing-rooms, he said.'

'Yes, he wouldn't write more,' said Mrs. Lawrence, nodding. 'You know, he would have had to do it himself if it had not been done for him. Adder saw

him some days back in a brown consultation near his club with Captain May. Oh, but of course it was accident! Did he call it so in his letter to you?'

'One word of Mr. Morsfield: he is wounded?'

'Past cure: he has the thing he cried for, spoilt boy as he was from his birth. I tell you truth, m' Aminta, I grieve to lose him. What with his airs of the foreign-tinted, punctilious courtly gentleman covering a survival of the ancient British forest boar or bear, he was a picture in our modern set, and piquant. And he was devoted to our sex, we must admit, after the style of the bears. They are for honey, and they have a hug. If he hadn't been so much of a madman, I should have liked him for his courage. He had plenty of that, nothing to steer it. A second cousin comes in for his estates.'

'He is dead?' Aminta cried.

'Yes, dear, he is gone. What the women think of it I can't say. The general feeling among the men is that some one of them would have had to send him sooner or later. The curious point, Adder says, is his letting it be done by steel. He was a dead shot, dangerous with the small sword, as your Mr. Weyburn said, only soon off his head. But I used to be anxious about the earl's meeting him with pistols. He did his best to provoke it. Here, Adder,'—she spoke over her shoulder, —'tell Lady Ormont all you know of the Morsfield-May affair.'

Lord Adderwood bowed compliance. His coolness was the masculine of Mrs. Lawrence's hardly feminine in treating of a terrible matter, so that the dull red facts had to be disengaged from his manner of speech before they sank into Aminta's acceptance of them as credible.

'They fought with foils, buttons off, preliminary ceremonies perfect; salute in due order; guard, and at it.

Odd thing was, nobody at Chiallo's had a notion of the business till Morsfield was pinked. He wouldn't be denied; went to work like a fellow meaning to be skewered, if he couldn't do the trick: and he tried it. May had been practising some weeks. He 's well on the Continent by this time. It 'll blow over. Button off sheer accident. I wasn't lucky enough to see the encounter: came in just when Chiallo was lashing his poll over Morsfield flat on the ground. He had it up to the hilt. We put a buttoned foil by the side of Morsfield, and all swore to secresy. As it is, it 'll go badly against poor Chiallo. Taste for fencing won't be much improved by the affair. They quarrelled in the dressing-room, and fetched the foils and knocked off the buttons there. A big rascal toady squire of Morsfield's did it for him. Morsfield was just up from Yorkshire. He said he was expecting a summons elsewhere, bound to await it, declined provocation for the present. May filliped him on the cheek.'

'Adder conveyed the information of her husband's flight to the consolable Amy,' said Mrs. Lawrence.

'He had to catch the coach for Dover,' Adderwood explained. 'His wife was at a dinner-party. I saw her at midnight.'

'Fair Amy was not so very greatly surprised?'

'Quite the soldier's wife!'

'She said she was used to these little catastrophes. But, Adder, what did she say of her husband?'

'Said she was never anxious about him, for nothing would kill him.'

Mrs. Lawrence shook a doleful head at Aminta.

'You see, my dear Aminta, here 's another, and probably her last, chance of sharing the marquisate gone. Who can fail to pity her, except old Time! And I 'm sure she likes her husband well enough. She ought:

no woman ever had such a servant. But the captain has not been known to fight without her sanction, and the inference is—— Alas! woe! Fair Amy is doomed to be the fighting captain's bride to the end of the chapter. Adder says she looked handsome. A dinner-party suits her cosmetic complexion better than a ball. The account of the inquest is in the day's papers, and we were tolerably rejoiced we could drive out of London without having to reply to coroner's questions.'

'He died—soon?' Aminta's voice was shaken.

Mrs. Lawrence touched at her breast, it might be for heart or lungs. Judging by Aminta's voice and face, one could suppose she was harking back, in woman's way, to her original sentiment for the man, now that he lay prostrate.

Aminta read the unreproachful irony in the smile addressed to her. She was too convulsed by her many emotions and shouting thoughts to think of defending herself.

Selina, in the drawing-room, diligently fingered and classed brown-black pressed weeds of her neophyte's botany-folios. The sight of her and her occupation struck Aminta as that of a person in another world beyond this world of blood, strangely substantial to view; and one heard her speak!

Guilty?—no. But she had wished to pique her lord. After the term of a length of months, could it be that the unhappy man and she were punished for the half-minute's acting of some interest in him? And Lord Ormont had been seen consulting Captain May; or was it giving him directions?

Her head burned. All the barren interrogations were up, running and knocking for hollow responses; and, saving a paleness of face, she cloaked any small show of the riot. She was an amiable hostess. She had ceased

to comprehend Mrs. Lawrence, even to the degree of thinking her unfeminine. She should have known that the 'angelical chimpanzee,' as a friend, once told of his being a favourite with the lady, had called her, could not simulate a feeling, and had not the slightest power of pretence to compassion for an ill-fated person who failed to quicken her enthusiasm. In that, too, she was a downright boy. Morsfield was a kind of Bedlamite to her; amusing in his antics, and requiring to be manœuvred and eluded while he lived: once dead, just a tombstone, of interest only to his family.

She beckoned Aminta to follow her; and, with a smirk of indulgent fun, commended Lord Adderwood to a study of Selina Collett's botany-folios, which the urbanest of indifferent gentlemen had slid his eyes over his nose to inspect before the lunch.

'You ought to know what is going on in town, my dear Aminta. You have won the earl to a sense of his duty, and he 's at work on the harder task of winning Lady Charlotte Eglett to a sense of hers. It 's tremendous. Has been forward some days, and no sign of yielding on either side. Mr. Eglett, good man, is between them, catching it right and left; and he deserves his luck for marrying her. Vows she makes him the best of wives. If he 's content, I 've nothing to complain of. You must be ready to receive her; my lord is sure to carry the day. You gulp. You won't be seeing much of her. I 'm glad to say he is condescending to terms of peace with the Horse Guards. We hear so. You may be throning it officially somewhere next year. And all 's well that ends well! Say that to me!'

'It is, when the end comes,' Aminta replied.

Mrs. Lawrence's cool lips were pressed to her cheek.

The couple and their waterman rowed away to the party they had left with the four-in-hand at their inn.

A wind was rising. The trees gave their swish of leaves, the river darkened the patch of wrinkles, the bordering flags amid the reed-blades dipped and streamed.

Surcharged with unassimilated news of events, that made a thunder in her head, Aminta walked down the garden path, meeting Selina and bearing her on. She had a witch's will to rouse gales. Hers was not the woman's nature to be driven cowering by stories of men's bloody deeds. She took the field, revolted, dissevering herself from the class which tolerated them—actuated by a reflective moralty, she believed; and loathed herself for having aspired, schemed, to be a member of the class. But it was not the class, it was against her lord as representative of the class, that she was now the rebel, neither naming him nor imaging him. Her enveloping mind was black on him. Such as one of those hard slaughtering men could call her his own? She breathed short and breathed deep. Her bitter reason had but the common pity for a madman despatched to his rest. Yet she knew hatred of her lord in his being suspected as instigator or accomplice of the hand that dealt the blow. He became to her thought a python whose coils were about her person, insufferable to the gaze backward.

Moments like these are the mothers in travail of a resolve joylessly conceived, undesired to clasp, Necessity's offspring. Thunderclouds have as little love of the lightnings they fling.

Aminta was aware only of her torment. The trees were bending, the water hissing, the grasses all this way and that, like hands of a delirious people in surges of wreck. She scorned the meaningless shake of the garments of earth, and exclaimed: 'If we were by the sea to-night!'

'I shall be to-morrow night,' said Selina. 'I shall think of you. Oh! would you come with me?'

'Would you have me?'

'My mother will indeed be honoured by your consenting to come.'

'Write to her before the post is out.'

'We shall travel down together?'

Aminta nodded and smiled, and Selina kissed her hand in joy, saying, that down home she would not be so shy of calling her Aminta. She was bidden to haste.

CHAPTER XXVI

VISITS OF FAREWELL

The noise in London over Adolphus Morsfield's tragical end disturbed Lord Ormont much less than the cessation of letters from his Aminta; and that likewise, considering his present business on her behalf, he patiently shrugged at and pardoned, foreseeing her penitent air. He could do it lightly after going some way to pardon his offending country. For Aminta had not offended; his robust observation of her was moved to the kindly humorous by a reflective view here and there of the downright woman her clever little shuffles exposed her to be, not worse. It was her sex that made her one of the gliders in grasses, some of whom are venomous; but she belonged to the order only as an innocuous blindworm. He could pronounce her small by-play with Morsfield innocent, her efforts to climb the stairs into Society quite innocent; judging her, of course, by her title of woman. A woman's innocence has a rainbow skin. Set this one beside other women, she comes out well, fairly well, well enough.

Now that the engagement with Charlotte assumed proportions of a series of battles, properly to be entitled a campaign, he had, in his loneliness, fallen into the habit of reflecting at the close of his day's work; and the rubbing of that unused opaque mirror hanging inside a man of action had helped him piecemeal to perceive bits of his conduct, entirely approved by him, which were intimately connected, nevertheless, with a train of circumstances that he disliked and could not charge justly upon any other shoulders than his own. What was to be thought of it? He would not be undergoing this botheration of the prolonged attempt to bring a stubborn woman to a sense of her duty, if he had declared his marriage in the ordinary style, and given his young countess her legitimate place before the world. What impeded it? The shameful ingratitude of his countrymen to the soldier who did it eminent service at a crisis of the destinies of our Indian Empire! He could not condone the injury done to him by entering among them again. Too like the kicked cur, that! He retired—call it 'sulked in his tent,' if you like. His wife had to share his fortunes. He being slighted, she necessarily was shadowed. For a while she bore it contentedly enough; then began her mousy scratches to get into the room off the wainscot, without blame from him; she behaved according to her female nature.

Yes, but the battles with Charlotte forced on his recognition once more, and violently, the singular consequences of his retirement and Coriolanus quarrel with his countrymen. He had doomed himself ever since to a contest with women. First it was his Queen of Amazons, who, if vanquished, was not so easily vanquished; and, in fact, doubtfully,—for now, to propitiate her, he had challenged, and must overcome or be disgraced, the toughest Amazonian warrior man could stand against

at cast of dart or lock of arms. No day scored an advantage; and she did not apparently suffer fatigue. He did: that is to say, he was worried and hurried to have the wrangle settled and Charlotte at Aminta's feet. He gained not an inch of ground. His principle in a contention of the sort was to leave the woman to the practice of her obvious artifices, and himself simply hammer, incessantly hammer. But Charlotte hammered as well. The modest position of the defensive negative was not to her taste. The moment he presented himself she flew out upon some yesterday's part of the argument and carried the war across the borders, in attacks on his character and qualities—his weakness regarding women, his incapacity to forgive, and the rest. She hammered on that head. As for any prospect of a termination of the strife, he could see none in her joyful welcome to him and regretful parting and pleased appointment of the next meeting day after day.

The absurdest of her devices for winding him off his aim was to harp on some new word she had got hold of: as, for example, to point out to him his aptitudes, compliment him on his aptitudes, recommend him to study and learn the limitations of his aptitudes! She revelled in something the word unfolded to her.

However, here was the point: she had to be beaten. So, if she, too, persisted in hammering, he must employ her female weapon of artifice with her. One would gladly avoid the stooping to it in a civil dispute, in which one is not so gloriously absolved for lying and entrapping as in splendid war.

Weyburn's name was announced to him at an early hour on Thursday morning. My lord nodded to the footman; he nodded to himself over a suggestion started in a tactical intelligence by the name.

'Ah! you 're off?' he accosted the young man.

'I have come to take my leave, my lord.'

'Nothing new in the morning papers?'

'A report that Captain May intends to return and surrender.'

'Not before a month has passed, if he follows my counsel.'

'To defend his character.'

'He has none.'

'His reputation.'

'He has too much.'

'These charges against him must be intolerable.'

'Was he not a bit of a pupil of yours?'

'We practised two or three times—nothing more.'

'Morsfield was a wasp at a feast. Somebody had to crush him. I 've seen the kind of man twice in my life; and exactly the kind of man. If their law puts down duelling, he rules the kingdom!'

'My lord, I should venture to say the kind of man can be a common annoyance because the breach of the law is countenanced.'

'Bad laws are best broken. A society that can't get a scouring now and then will be a dirty set.'

With a bend of the head, in apology for speaking of himself, Weyburn said: 'I have acted on my view. I declined a challenge from a sort of henchman of his.'

'Oh! a poacher's lurcher? You did right. Fight such fellows with constables. You have seen Lady Charlotte?'

'I am on my way to her ladyship.'

'Do me this favour. Fourteen doors up the street of her residence, my physician lives. I have to consult him at once. Dr. Rewkes.'

Weyburn bowed. Lady Charlotte could not receive him later than half-past ten of the morning, he said.

'This morning she can,' said my lord. 'You will

tell Dr. Rewkes that it is immediate. I rather regret your going. I shall be in a controversy with the Horse Guards about our cavalry saddles. It would be regiments of raw backs the first fortnight of a campaign.'

The earl discoursed on saddles; and passed to high eulogy of our Hanoverian auxiliar troopers in the Peninsula; 'good husbands,' he named them quaintly, speaking of their management of their beasts. Thence he diverged to Frederic's cavalry, rarely matched for shrewdness and endurance; to the deeds of the Liechtenstein Hussars; to the great things Blucher did with his horsemen.

The subject was interesting; but Weyburn saw the clock at past the half after ten. He gave a slight sign of restiveness, and was allowed to go when the earl had finished his *pro* and *con* upon Arab horses and Mameluke saddles. Lord Ormont nicked his head, just as at their first interview: he was known to have an objection to the English shaking of hands. 'Good-morning,' he said; adding a remark or two, of which *et cætera* may stand for an explicit rendering. It concerned the young man's prosperity: my lord's conservative plain sense was in doubt of the prospering of a giddy pate, however good a worker. His last look at the young man, who had not served him badly, held an anticipation of possibly some day seeing a tatterdemalion of shipwreck, a rueful exhibition of ideas put to the business of life.

Weyburn left the message with Dr. Rewkes in person. It had not seemed to him that Lord Ormont was one requiring the immediate attendance of a physician. By way of accounting to Lady Charlotte for the lateness of his call, he mentioned the summons he had delivered.

'Oh, that 's why he hasn't come yet,' said she. 'We 'll sit and talk till he does come. I don't wonder if his bile has been stirred. He can't oil me to credit what he

pumps into others. His Lady Ormont! I believe in it less than ever I did. Morsfield or no Morsfield—and now the poor wretch has got himself pinned to the plank, like my grandson Bobby's dragonflies, I don't want to say anything further of him—she doesn't have much of a welcome at Steignton! If I were a woman to wager as men do, I 'd stake a thousand pounds to five on her never stepping across the threshold of Steignton. All very well in London, and that place he hires up at Marlow. He respects our home. That 's how I know my brother Rowsley still keeps a sane man. A fortune on it!—and so says Mr. Eglett. Any reasonable person must think it. He made a fool of some Hampton-Evey at Madrid, if he went through any ceremony—and that I doubt. But she and old (what do they call her?) may have insisted upon the title, as much as they could. He sixty, she under twenty, I 'm told. Pagnell 's the name. That aunt of a good-looking young woman sees a noble man of sixty admiring her five feet seven or so—she 's tall—of marketable merchandise, and she doesn't need telling that at sixty he 'll give the world to possess the girl. But not his family honour! He stops at that. Why? Lord Ormont 's made of pride! He 'll be kind to her, he 'll be generous, he won't forsake her; she 'll have her portion in his will, and by the course of things in nature, she 'll outlive him and marry, and be happy, I hope. Only she won't enter Steignton. You remember what I say. You 'll live when I 'm gone. It 's the thirst of her life to be mistress of Steignton. Not she!—though Lord Ormont would have us all open our doors to her; mine too, now he 's about it. He sets his mind on his plan, and he forgets rights and dues—everything; he must have it as his will dictates. That 's how he made such a capital soldier. You know the cavalry leader he was. If they 'd given him a field in Europe! His enemies

admit that. Twelve! and my clock 's five minutes or more slow. What can Rowsley be doing?'

She rattled backward on the scene at Steignton, and her brother's handsome preservation of his dignity: 'stood it like the king he is!' and to the Morsfield-May encounter, which had prevented another; and Mrs. May was rolled along in the tide, with a hint of her good reason for liking Lord Ormont; also the change of opinion shown by the Press as to Lord Ormont's grand exploit. Referring to it, she flushed and jigged on her chair for a saddle beneath her. And that glorious Indian adventure warmed her to the man who had celebrated it among his comrades when a boy at school.

'You 're to teach Latin and Greek, you said. For you 're right: we English can't understand the words we 're speaking, if we don't know a good deal of Latin and some Greek. "Conversing in tokens, not standard coin," you said, I remember; and there 'll be a "general rabble tongue," unless we English are drilled in the languages we filched from. Lots of lords and ladies want the drilling, then! I 'll send some over to you for Swiss air and roots of the English tongue. Oh, and you told me you supported Lord Ormont on his pet argument for *corps d'élite*; and you quoted Virgil to back it. Let me have that line again—in case of his condescending to write to the papers on the subject.'

Weyburn repeated the half-line.

'Good: I won't forget now. And you said the French act on that because they follow human nature, and the English don't. We "bully it," you said. That was on our drive down to Steignton. I hope you 'll succeed. You 'll be visiting England. Call on me in London or at Olmer—only mind and give me warning. I shall be glad to see you. I 've got some ideas from you. If I meet a man who helps me to read the world and men as

they are, I 'm grateful to him; and most people are not, you 'll find. They want you to show them what they 'd like the world to be. We don't agree about a lady. You 're in the lists, lance in rest, all for chivalry. You 're a man, and a young man. Have you taken your leave of her yet? She 'll expect it, as a proper compliment.'

'I propose running down to take my leave of Lady Ormont to-morrow,' replied Weyburn.

'She is handsome?'

'She is very handsome.'

'Beautiful, do you mean?'

'Oh, my lady, it would only be a man's notion!'

'Now, that 's as good an answer as could be made! You 're sure to succeed. I 'm not the woman's enemy. But let her keep her place. Why, Rowsley can't be coming to-day! Did Lord Ormont look ill?'

'It did not strike me so.'

'He 's between two fires. A man gets fretted. But I shan't move a step. I dare say she won't. Especially with that Morsfield out of the way. You do mean you think her a beauty. Well, then, there 'll soon be a successor to Morsfield. Beauties will have their weapons, and they can hit on plenty; and it 's nothing to me, as long as I save my brother from their arts.'

Weyburn felt he had done his penance in return for kindness. He bowed and rose, Lady Charlotte stretched out her hand.

'We shall be sending you a pupil some day,' she said, and smiled. 'Forward your address as soon as you 're settled.' Her face gave a glimpse of its youth in a cordial farewell smile.

Lord Ormont had no capacity to do the like, although they were strictly brother and sister in appearance. The smallest difference in character rendered her complex and kept him simple. She had a thirsting mind.

Weyburn fancied that a close intimacy of a few months would have enabled him to lift her out of her smirching and depraving mean jealousies. He speculated, as he trod the street, on little plots and surprises, which would bring Lady Charlotte and Lady Ormont into presence, and end by making friends of them. Supposing that could be done, Lady Ormont might be righted by the intervention of Lady Charlotte after all.

Weyburn sent his dream flying with as dreamy an after-thought: 'Funny it will be then for Lady Charlotte to revert to the stuff she has been droning in my ear half an hour ago!—Look well behind, and we see spots where we buzzed, lowed, bit and tore; and not until we have cast that look and seen the brute are we human creatures.'

A crumb of reflection such as this could brace him, adding its modest maravedi to his prized storehouse of gain, fortifying with assurances of his having a concrete basis for his business in life. His great youthful ambition had descended to it, but had sunk to climb on a firmer footing.

Arthur Abner had his next adieu. They talked of Lady Ormont, as to whose position of rightful Countess of Ormont Mr. Abner had no doubt. He said of Lady Charlotte: 'She has a clear head; but she loves her "brother Rowsley" excessively; and any excess pushes to craziness.'

He spoke to Weyburn of his prospects in the usually, perhaps necessarily, cheerless tone of men who recognize by contrast the one mouse's nibbling at a mountain of evil. 'To harmonize the nationalities, my dear boy!—teach Christians to look fraternally on Jews! David was a harper, but the setting of him down to roll off a fugue on one of your cathedral organs would not impose a heavier task than you are undertaking. You have my

best wishes, whatever aid I can supply. But we 're nearer to King John's time than to your ideal, as far as the Jews go.'

'Not in England.'

'Less in England,' Abner shrugged.

'You have beaten the Christians on the field they challenged you to enter for a try. They feel the pinch in their interests and their vanity. That will pass. I 'm for the two sides, under the name of Justice; and I give the palm to whichever of the two first gets hold of the idea of Justice. My old schoolmate 's well?'

'Always asking after Matey Weyburn!'

'He shall have my address in Switzerland. You and I will be corresponding.'

Now rose to view the visit to the lady who was Lady Ormont on the tongue, Aminta at heart; never to be named Aminta even to himself. His heart broke loose at a thought of it.

He might say Browny. For that was not serious with the intense present signification the name Aminta had. Browny was queen of the old school-time—enclosed it in her name; and that sphere enclosed her, not excluding him. And the dear name of Browny played gently, humorously, fervently, too, with life: not pathetically, as that of Aminta did when came a whisper of her situation, her isolation, her friendlessness; hardly dissimilar to what could be imagined of a gazelle in the streets of London city. The Morsfields were not all slain. The Weyburns would be absent.

At the gate of his cottage garden Weyburn beheld a short unfamiliar figure of a man with dimly remembered features. Little Collett he still was in height. The schoolmates had not met since the old days of Cuper's.

Little Collett delivered a message of invitation from Selina, begging Mr. Weyburn to accompany her brother

on the coach to Harwich next day, and spend two or three days by the sea. But Weyburn's mind had been set in the opposite direction—up Thames instead of down.

He was about to refuse, but he checked his voice and hummed. Words of Selina's letter jumped in italics. He perceived Lady Ormont's hand. For one thing, would she be at Great Marlow alone? And he knew that hand —how deftly it moved and moved others. Selina Collett would not have invited him with underlinings merely to see a shoreside house and garden. Her silence regarding a particular name showed her to be under injunction, one might guess. At worst, it would be the loss of a couple of days; worth the venture. They agreed to journey by coach next day.

Facing eastward in the morning, on a seat behind the coachman, Weyburn had a seafaring man beside him, bound for the good port of Harwich, where his family lived, and thence by his own boat to Flushing. Weyburn set him talking of himself, as the best way of making him happy; for it is the theme which pricks to speech, and so liberates an uncomfortably locked-up stranger; who, if sympathetic to human proximity, is thankful. They exchanged names, delighted to find they were both Matthews; whereupon Matthew of the sea demanded the paw of Matthew of the land, and there was a squeeze. The same with little Collett, after hearing of him as the old schoolmate of the established new friend. Then there was talk. Little Collett named Felixstowe as the village of his mother's house and garden sloping to the sands. 'That 's it—you have it,' said the salted Matthew: 'peace is in that spot, and there I 've sworn to pitch my tent when I 'm incapacitated for further exercise—profitable, so to speak. My eldest girl has a bar of amber she picked up one wash of the tide at

Felixstowe, and there it had been lying sparkling, unseen, hours, the shore is that solitary. What I like!—a quiet shore and a peopled sea. Ever been to Brighton? There it 's t' other way.'

Not long after he had mentioned the time of early evening for their entry into his port of Harwich, the coach turned quietly over on a bank of the roadside, depositing outside passengers quite safely, in so matter-of-course a way, that only the screams of an uninjured lady inside repressed their roars of laughter. One of the wheels had come loose, half a mile off the nearest town. Their entry into Harwich was thereby delayed until half-past nine at night. Full of consideration for the new mates now fast wedded to his heart by an accident, Matthew Shale proposed to Matthew Weyburn, instead of the bother of crossing the ferry with a portmanteau and a bag at that late hour, to sup at his house, try the neighbouring inn for a short sleep, and ship on board his yawl, the honest Susan, to be rowed ashore off the Swin to Felixstowe sands no later than six o'clock of a summer's morning, in time for a bath and a swim before breakfast. It sounded well—it sounded sweetly. Weyburn suggested the counter proposal of supper for the three at the inn. But the other Matthew said: 'I married a cook. She expects a big appetite, and she always keeps warm when I 'm held away, no matter how late. Sure to be enough.'

Beds were secured at the inn; after which came the introduction to Mrs. Shale, the exhibition of Susan Shale's bar of amber, the dish of fresh-fried whiting, the steak pudding, a grog, tobacco, rest at the inn, and a rousing bang at the sleepers' doors when the unwonted supper in them withheld an answer to the intimating knock. Young Matthew Shale, who had slept on board the Susan, conducted them to her boat. His glance was much drawn

to the very white duck trousers Weyburn had put on, for a souvenir of the approbation they had won at Marlow. They were on, and so it was of no use for young Matthew to say they were likely to bear away a token from the Susan. She was one among the damsels of colour, and free of her tokens, especially to the spotless.

How it occurred, nobody saw; though everybody saw how naturally it must occur for the white ducks to 'have it in the eye' by the time they had been on board a quarter of an hour. Weyburn got some fun out of them, for a counterbalance to a twitch of sentimental regret scarcely decipherable, as that the last view of him should bear a likeness of Browny's recollection of her first.

A glorious morning of flushed open sky and sun on sea chased all small thoughts out of it. The breeze was from the west, and the Susan, lightly laden, took the heave of smooth rollers with a flowing current-curtsey in the motion of her speed. Fore-sail and aft were at their gentle strain; her shadow rippled fragmentarily along to the silver rivulet and boat of her wake. Straight she flew to the ball of fire now at spring above the waters, and raining red gold on the line of her bows. By comparison she was an ugly yawl, and as the creature of wind and wave beautiful.

They passed an English defensive fort, and spared its walls, in obedience to Matthew Shale's good counsel that they should forbear from sneezing. Little Collett pointed to the roof of his mother's house twenty paces rearward of a belt of tamarisks, green amid the hollowed yellows of shorebanks yet in shade, crumbling to the sands. Weyburn was attracted by a diminutive white tent, of sentry-box shape, evidently a bather's, quite as evidently a fair bather's. He would have to walk on some way for his dip. He remarked to little Collett that ladies going into the water half-dressed never have more than half a

bath. His arms and legs flung out contempt of that style of bathing, exactly in old Matey's well-remembered way.

Half a mile off shore, the Susan was put about to flap her sails, and her boat rocked with the passengers. Turning from a final cheer to friendly Matthew, Weyburn at the rudder espied one of those unenfranchised ladies in marine uniform issuing through the tent-slit. She stepped firmly, as into her element. A plain look at her, and a curious look, and an intent look fixed her fast, and ran the shock on his heart before he knew of a guess. She waded, she dipped; a head across the breast of the waters was observed: this one of them could swim. She was making for sea, a stone's throw off the direction of the boat. Before his wits had grasped the certainty possessing them, fiery envy and desire to be alongside her set his fingers fretting at buttons. A grand smooth swell of the waters lifted her, and her head rose to see her world. She sank down the valley, where another wave was mounding for its onward roll: a gentle scene of the *βάντ' ἐπιόντα* of Weyburn's favourite Sophoclean chorus. Now she was given to him—it was she. How could it ever have been any other! He handed his watch to little Collett, and gave him the ropes, pitched coat and waistcoat on his knees, stood free of boots and socks, and singing out, truly enough, the words of a popular cry, 'White ducks want washing,' went over and in.

CHAPTER XXVII

A MARINE DUET

She soon had to know she was chased. She had seen the dive from the boat, and received an illumination. With a chuckle of delighted surprise, like a blackbird startled,

she pushed seaward for joy of the effort, thinking she could exult in imagination of an escape up to the moment of capture, yielding then only to his greater will; and she meant to try it.

The swim was a holiday; all was new—nothing came to her as the same old thing since she took her plunge; she had a sea-mind—had left her earth-mind ashore. The swim, and Matey Weyburn pursuing her passed up, out of happiness, through the spheres of delirium, into the region where our life is as we would have it be: a home holding the quiet of the heavens, if but midway thither, and a home of delicious animation of the whole frame, equal to wings.

He drew on her, but he was distant, and she waved an arm. The shout of her glee sprang from her: 'Matey!' He waved; she heard his voice. Was it her name? He was not so drunken of the sea as she: he had not leapt out of bondage into buoyant waters, into a youth without a blot, without an aim, satisfied in tasting; the dream of the long felicity.

A thought brushed by her: How if he were absent?

It relaxed her stroke of arms and legs. He had doubled the salt sea's rapture, and he had shackled its gift of freedom. She turned to float, gathering her knees for the funny sullen kick, until she heard him near. At once her stroke was renewed vigorously; she had the foot of her pursuer, and she called, 'Adieu, Matey Weyburn!'

Her bravado deserved a swifter humiliation than he was able to bring down on her: she swam bravely, and she was divine to see ahead as well as overtake.

Darting to the close parallel, he said: 'What sea-nymph sang me my name?'

She smote a pang of her ecstasy into him: 'Ask mine!'

'Browny!'

They swam; neither of them panted; their heads were water-flowers that spoke at ease.

'We 've run from school; we won't go back.'

'We 've a kingdom.'

'Here 's a big wave going to be a wall.'

'Off he rolls.'

'He 's like the High Brent broad meadow under Elling Wood.'

'Don't let Miss Vincent hear you.'

'They 're not waves; they 're sighs of the deep.'

'A poet I swim with! He fell into the deep in his first of May morning ducks. We used to expect him.'

'I never expected to owe them so much.'

Pride of the swimmer and the energy of her joy embraced Aminta, that she might nerve all her powers to gain the half-minute for speaking at her ease.

'Who 'd have thought of a morning like this? You were looked for last night.'

'A lucky accident to our coach. I made friends with the skipper of the yawl.'

'I saw the boat. Who could have dreamed——? Anything may happen now.'

For nothing further would astonish her, as he rightly understood her; but he said: 'You 're prepared for the rites? Old Triton is ready.'

'Float, and tell me.'

They spun about to lie on their backs. Her right hand, at piano-work of the octave-shake, was touched and taken, and she did not pull it away. Her eyelids fell.

'Old Triton waits.'

'Why?'

'We 're going to him.'

'Yes?'

'Customs of the sea.'

'Tell me.'

'He joins hands. We say, "Browny—Matey," and it 's done.'

She splashed, crying 'Swim,' and after two strokes, 'You want to beat me, Matey Weyburn.'

'How?'

'Not fair!'

'Say what.'

'Take my breath. But, yes! we 'll be happy in our own way. We 're sea-birds. We 've said adieu to land. Not to one another. We shall be friends?'

'Always.'

'This is going to last?'

'Ever so long.'

They had a spell of steady swimming, companionship to inspirit it. Browny was allowed place a little foremost, and she guessed not wherefore, in her flattered emulation.

'I 'm bound for France.'

'Slew a point to the right: South-east by South. We shall hit Dunkerque.'

'I don't mean to be picked up by boats.'

'We 'll decline.'

'You see I can swim.'

'I was sure of it.'

They stopped their talk—for the pleasure of the body to be savoured in the mind, they thought; and so took Nature's counsel to rest their voices awhile.

Considering that she had not been used of late to long immersions, and had not broken her fast, and had talked much, for a sea-nymph, Weyburn spied behind him on a shore seeming flat down, far removed.

'France next time,' he said: 'we 'll face to the rear.'

'Now?' said she, big with blissful conceit of her powers and incredulous of such a command from him.

'You may be feeling tired presently.'

The musical sincerity of her 'Oh no, not I!' sped through his limbs; he had a willingness to go onward still some way.

But his words fastened the heavy land on her spirit, knocked at the habit of obedience. Her stroke of the arms paused. She inclined to his example, and he set it shoreward.

They swam silently, high, low, creatures of the smooth green roller. He heard the water-song of her swimming.

She, though breathing equably at the nostrils, lay deep. The water shocked at her chin, and curled round the under lip. He had a faint anxiety; and, not so sensible of a weight in the sight of land as she was, he chattered, by snatches, rallied her, encouraged her to continue sportive for this once, letting her feel it was but a once and had its respected limit with him. So it was not out of the world.

Ah, friend Matey! And that was right and good on land; but rightness and goodness flung earth's shadow across her brilliancy here, and any stress on 'this once' withdrew her liberty to revel in it, putting an end to perfect holiday; and silence, too, might hint at fatigue. She began to think her muteness lost her the bloom of the enchantment, robbing her of her heavenly frolic lead, since friend Matey resolved to be as eminently good in salt water as on land. Was he unaware that they were boy and girl again?—she washed pure of the intervening years, new born, by blessing of the sea; worthy of him here!—that is, a swimmer worthy of him, his comrade in salt water.

'You 're satisfied I swim well?' she said.

'It would go hard with me if we raced a long race.'

'I really was out for France.'

'I was ordered to keep you for England.'

She gave him Browny's eyes.

'We 've turned our backs on Triton.'

'The ceremony was performed.'

'When?'

'The minute I spoke of it and you splashed.'

'Matey! Matey Weyburn!'

'Browny Farrell!'

'Oh, Matey! she 's gone!'

'She 's here.'

'Try to beguile me, then, that our holiday 's not over. You won't forget this hour?'

'No time of mine on earth will live so brightly for me.'

'I have never had one like it. I could go under and be happy; go to old Triton, and wait for you; teach him to speak your proper Christian name. He hasn't heard it yet,—heard "Matey,"—never yet has been taught "Matthew." '

'Aminta!'

'Oh, my friend! my dear!' she cried, in the voice of the wounded, like a welling of her blood: 'my strength will leave me. I may play—not you: you play with a weak vessel. Swim, and be quiet. How far do you count it?'

'Under a quarter of a mile.'

'Don't imagine me tired.'

'If you are, hold on to me.'

'Matey, I 'm for a dive.'

He went after the ball of silver and bubbles, and they came up together. There is no history of events below the surface.

She shook off her briny blindness, and settled to the full sweep of the arms, quite silent now. Some emotion,

or exhaustion from the strain of the swimmer's breath in speech, stopped her playfulness. The pleasure she still knew was a recollection of the outward swim, when she had been privileged to cast away sex with the push from earth, as few men will believe that women, beautiful women, ever wish to do; and often and ardently during the run ahead they yearn for Nature to grant them their one short holiday truce.

But Aminta forgave him for bringing earth so close to her when there was yet a space of salt water between her and shore; and she smiled at times, that he might not think she was looking grave.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PLIGHTING

They touched sand at the first draw of the ebb, and this being earth, Matey addressed himself to the guardian and absolving genii of matter-of-fact, by saying; 'Did you inquire about the tides?'

Her head shook, stunned with what had passed. She waded to shore, after motioning for him to swim on.

Men, in comparison beside their fair fellows, are so little sensationally complex, that his one feeling now, as to what had passed, was relief at the idea of his presence having been a warrantable protectorship.

Aminta's return from the sea-nymph to the state of woman crossed annihiliation on the way back to sentience, and picked up meaningless pebbles and shells of life, between the sea's verge and her tent's shelter; hardly her own life to her understanding yet, except for the hammer Memory became, to strike her insensible, at

here and there a recollected word or nakedness of her soul.

He swam along by the shore to where the boat was paddled, spying at her bare feet on the sand, her woman's form. He waved, and the figure in the striped tunic and trousers waved her response, apparently the same person he had quitted.

Dry and clad, and decently formal under the transformation, they met at Mrs. Collett's breakfast-table, and in each hung the doubt whether land was the dream or sea. Both owned to a swim; both omitted mention of the tale of white ducks. Little Collett had brought Matey's and his portmanteau into the house, by favour of the cook, through the scullery. He, who could have been a pictorial and suggestive narrator, carried a spinning head off his shoulders from this wonderful Countess of Ormont to Matey Weyburn's dark-eyed Browny at High Brent, and the Sunday walk in Sir Peter Wensell's park. Away and back his head went. Browny was not to be thought of as Browny; she was this grand Countess of Ormont; she had married Matey Weyburn's hero: she would never admit she had been Browny. Only she was handsome then, and she is handsome now; and she looks on Matey Weyburn now just as she did then. How strange is the world! Or how if we are the particular person destined to encounter the strange things of the world? And fancy J. Masner, and Pinnett major, and young Oakes (liked nothing better than a pretty girl, he strutted boasting at thirteen), and the Frenchy, and the lot, all popping down at the table, and asked the name of the lady sitting like Queen Esther—how they would roar out! Boys, of course—but men, too!—very few men have a notion of the extraordinary complications and coincidences and cracker-surprises life contains. Here 's an instance; Matey Weyburn positively will

wear white ducks to play before Aminta Farrell on the first of May cricketing-day. He happens to have his white ducks on when he sees the Countess of Ormont swimming in the sea; and so he can go in just as if they were all-right bathing-drawers. In he goes, has a good long swim with her, and when he comes out, says, of his dripping ducks, 'tabula votiva . . . avida vestimenta,' to remind an old schoolmate of his hopping to the booth at the end of a showery May day, and dedicating them to the laundry in these words. It seems marvellous.

It was a quaint revival, an hour after breakfast, for little Collett to be acting as intermediary with Selina to request Lady Ormont's grant of a five-minutes' interview before the church-bell summoned her. She was writing letters, and sent the message: 'Tell Mr. Weyburn I obey.' Selina delivered it, uttering 'obey' in a demurely comical way, as a word of which the humour might be comprehensible to him.

Aminta stood at the drawing-room window. She was asking herself whether her recent conduct shrieked coquette to him, or any of the abominable titles showered on the women who take free breath of air one day after long imprisonment.

She said: 'Does it mean you are leaving us?' the moment he was near.

'Not till evening or to-morrow, as it may happen,' he answered: 'I have one or two things to say, if you will spare the time.'

'All my time,' said she, smiling to make less of the heart's reply; and he stepped into the room.

They had not long back been Matey and Browny, and though that was in another element, it would not sanction the Lady Ormont and Mr. Weyburn now. As little could it be Aminta and Matthew. Brother and sister they were in the spirit's world, but in this world the titles had

a sound of imposture. And with a great longing to call her by some allying name, he rejected 'friend' for its insufficiency and commonness, notwithstanding the entirely friendly nature of the burden to be spoken. Friend, was a title that ran on quicksands: an excuse that tried for an excuse. He distinguished in himself simultaneously, that the hesitation and beating about for a name had its origin in an imperfect frankness when he sent his message: the fretful desire to be with her, close to her, hearing her, seeing her, besides the true wish to serve her. He sent it after swinging round abruptly from an outlook over the bordering garden tamarisks on a sea now featureless, desolately empty.

However, perceptibly silence was doing the work of a scourge, and he said: 'I have been thinking I may have—and I don't mind fighting hard to try it before I leave England on Tuesday or Wednesday—some influence with Lady Charlotte Eglett. She is really one of the true women living, and the heartiest of backers, if she can be taught to see her course. I fancy I can do that. She 's narrow, but she is not one of the class who look on the working world below them as, we 'll say, the scavenger dogs on the plains of Ilium were seen by the Achaeans. And my failure would be no loss to you! Your name shall not be alluded to as empowering me to plead for her help. But I want your consent, or I may be haunted and weakened by the idea of playing the busy-body. One has to feel strong in a delicate position. Well, you know what my position with her has been—one among the humble; and she has taken contradictions, accepted views from me, shown me she has warmth of heart to an extreme degree.'

Aminta slightly raised her hand. 'I will save you trouble. I have written to Lord Ormont. I have left him.'

Their eyes engaged on the thunder of this.

'The letter has gone?'

'It was posted before my swim: posted yesterday.'

'You have fully and clearly thought it out to a determination?'

'Bit by bit—I might say, blow by blow.'

'It is no small matter to break a marriage-tie.'

'I have conversed with your mother.'

'Yes, she! and the woman happiest in marriage!'

'I know. It was hatred of injustice, noble sympathy. And she took me for one of the blest among wives.'

'She loved God. She saw the difference between men's decrees for their convenience, and God's laws. She felt for women. You have had a hard trial, Aminta.'

'Oh, my name! You mean it?'

'You heard it from me this morning.'

'Yes, there! I try to forget. I lost my senses. You may judge me harshly, on reflection.'

'Judge myself worse, then. You had a thousand excuses. I had only my love of you. There 's no judgement against either of us, for us to see, if I read rightly. We elect to be tried in the courts of the sea-god. Now we 'll sit and talk it over. The next ten minutes will decide our destinies.'

His eyes glittered, otherwise he showed the coolness of the man discussing business; and his blunt soberness refreshed and upheld her, as a wild burst of passion would not have done.

Side by side, partly facing, they began their interchange.

'You have weighed what you abandon?'

'It weighs little.'

'That may be error. You have to think into the future.'

'My sufferings and experiences are not bad guides.'

'They count. How can you be sure you have all the estimates?'

'Was I ever a wife?'

'You were and are the Countess of Ormont.'

'Not to the world. An unacknowledged wife is a slave, surely.'

'You step down, if you take the step.'

'From what? Once I did desire that station—had an idea it was glorious. I despise it: or rather the woman who had the desire.'

'But the step down is into the working world.'

'I have means to live humbly. I want no more, except to be taught to work.'

'So says the minute. Years are before you. You have weighed well, that you attract?'

She reddened and murmured: 'How small!' Her pout of spite at her attractions was little simulated.

'Beauty and charm are not small matters. You have the gift, called fatal. Then—looking right forward—you have faith in the power of resistance of the woman living alone?'

He had struck at her breast. From her breast she replied.

'Hear this of me. I was persecuted with letters. I read them and did not destroy them. Perhaps you saved me. Looking back, I see weakness, nothing worse; but it is a confession.'

'Yes, you have courage. And that comes of a great heart. And therein lies the danger.'

'Advise me of what is possible to a lonely woman.'

'You have resolved on the loneliness?'

'It means breathing to me.'

'You are able to see that Lord Ormont is a gentleman?'

'A chivalrous gentleman, up to the bounds of his intelligence.'

The bounds of his intelligence closed their four walls in a rapid narrowing slide on Aminta's mind, and she exclaimed:

'If only to pluck flowers in fields and know their names, I must be free! I say what one can laugh at, and you are good and don't. Is the interrogatory exhausted?'

'Aminta, my beloved, if you are free, I claim you.'

'Have you thought——?'

The sense of a dissolving to a fountain quivered through her veins.

'Turn the tables and examine me.'

'But have you thought—oh! I am not the girl you loved. I would go through death to feel I was, and give you one worthy of you.'

'That means what I won't ask you to speak at present; but I must have proof.'

He held out a hand, and hers was laid in his.

There was more for her to say, she knew. It came and fled, lightened and darkened. She had yielded her hand to him here on land, not with the licence and protection of the great holiday salt water; and she was trembling from the run of his blood through hers at the pressure of hands, when she said in undertones: 'Could we—we might be friends.'

'Meet and part as friends, you and I,' he replied.

His voice carried the answer for her, his intimate look had in it the unfolding of the full flower of the woman to him, as she could not conceal from such eyes; and feeling that, she was all avowal.

'It is for life, Matthew.'

'My own words to myself when I first thought of the chance.'

'But the school?'

'I shall not consider that we are malefactors. We have the world against us. It will not keep us from trying to serve it. And there are hints of humaner opinions; it 's not all a huge rolling block of a Juggernaut. Our case could be pleaded before it. I don't think the just would condemn us heavily. I shall have to ask you to strengthen me, complete me. If you love me, it is your leap out of prison, and without you, I am from this time no better than one-third of a man. I trust you to weigh the position you lose, and the place we choose to take in the world. It 's this—I think this describes it. You know the man who builds his house below the sea's level has a sleepless enemy always threatening. His house must be firm and he must look to the dykes. We commit this indiscretion. With a world against us, our love and labour are constantly on trial; we must have great hearts, and if the world is hostile we are not to blame it. In the nature of things it could not be otherwise. My own soul, we have to see that we do—though not publicly, not insolently, offend good citizenship. But we believe—I with my whole faith, and I may say it of you—that we are not offending Divine law. You are the woman I can help and join with; think whether you can tell yourself that I am the man. So, then, our union gives us powers to make amends to the world, if the world should grant us a term of peace for the effort. That is our risk; consider it, Aminta, between now and to-morrow; deliberate. We don't go together into a garden of roses.'

'I know. I should feel shame. I wish it to look dark,' said Aminta, her hand in his, and yet with a fair-sailing mind on the stream of the blood.

Rationally and irrationally, the mixed passion and

reason in two clear heads and urgent hearts discussed the stand they made before a world defied, neither of them quite perceiving what it was which coloured reason to beauty, or what so convinced their intellects when passion spoke the louder.

'I am to have a mate.'

'She will pray she may be one.'

'She is my first love.'

Aminta's lips formed 'mine.' without utterance.

Meanwhile his hand or a wizardry subdued her will, allured her body. She felt herself being drawn to the sign and seal of their plighting for life. She said, 'Matthew,' softly in protest; and he said, 'Never once yet!' She was owing to his tenderness. Her deepened voice murmured: 'Is this to deliberate?' Colour flooded the beautiful dark face, as of the funeral hues of a sun suffusing all the heavens, firing earth.

CHAPTER XXIX

AMINTA TO HER LORD

On Friday, on Saturday, on Sunday, Lady Charlotte waited for her brother Rowsley, until it was a diminished satisfaction that she had held her ground and baffled his mighty will to subdue her. She did not sleep for thinking of him on the Sunday night. Toward morning a fit of hazy horrors, which others would have deemed imaginings, drove her from her bed to sit and brood over Rowsley in a chair. What if it was a case of heart with him too? Heart disease had been in the family. A man like Rowsley, still feeling the world before him, as a man of his energies and *aptitudes*, her humour

added in the tide of his anxieties, had a right to feel, would not fall upon resignation like a woman.

She was at the physician's door at eight o'clock. Dr. Rewkes reported reassuringly; it was a simple disturbance in Lord Ormont's condition of health, and he conveyed just enough of disturbance to send the impetuous lady knocking and ringing at her brother's door upon the hour of nine.

The announcement of Lady Charlotte's early visit informed my lord that Dr. Rewkes had done the spiriting required of him. He descended to the library and passed under scrutiny.

'You don't look ill, Rowsley,' she said, reluctantly in the sound.

'I am the better for seeing you here, Charlotte. Shall I order breakfast for you? I am alone.'

'I know you are. I 've eaten. Rewkes tells me you 've not lost appetite.'

'Have I the appearance of a man who has lost anything?' Prouder man, and heartier and ruddier, could not be seen, she thought.

'You 're winning the country to right you; that I know.'

'I don't ask it.'

'The country wants your services.'

'I have heard some talk of it. That lout comes to a knowledge of his wants too late. If they promoted and offered me the command in India to-morrow——' My lord struck the arm of his chair. 'I live at Steignton henceforth; my wife is at a seaside place eastward. She left the jewel-case when on her journey through London for safety; she is a particularly careful person, forethoughtful. I take her down to Steignton two days after her return. We entertain there in the autumn. You come?'

'I don't. I prefer decent society.'

'You are in her house now, ma'am.'

'If I have to meet the person, you mean, I shall be civil. The society you 've given her, I won't meet.'

'You will have to meet the Countess of Ormont if you care to meet your brother.'

'Part, then, on the best terms we can. I say this, the woman who keeps you from serving your country, she 's your country's enemy.'

'Hear my answer. The lady who is my wife has had to suffer for what you call my country's treatment of me. It 's a choice between my country and her. I give her the rest of my time.'

'That 's dotage.'

'Fire away your epithets.'

'Sheer dotage. I don't deny she 's a handsome young woman.'

'You 'll have to admit that Lady Ormont takes her place in our family with the best we can name.'

'You insult my ears, Rowsley.'

'The world will say it when it has the honour of her acquaintance.'

'An honour suspiciously deferred.'

'That 's between the world and me.'

'Set your head to work, you 'll screw the world to any pitch you like—that I don't need telling.'

Lord Ormont's head approved the remark.

'Now,' said Lady Charlotte, 'you won't get the Danmores, the Dukerlys, the Carminters, the Oxbridges any more than you get me.'

'You are wrong, ma'am. I had yesterday a reply from Lady Danmore to a communication of mine.'

'It 's thickening. But while I stand, I stand for the family; and I 'm not in it, and while I stand out of it, there 's a doubt either of your honesty or your sanity.'

'There 's a perfect comprehension of my sister!'

'I put my character in the scales against your conduct, and your Countess of Ormont's reputation into the bargain.'

'You have called at her house; it 's a step. You 'll be running at her heels next. She 's not obdurate.'

'When you see me running at her heels, it 'll be with my head off. Stir your hardest, and let it thicken. That man Morsfield's name mixed up with a sham Countess of Ormont, in the stories flying abroad, can't hurt anybody. A true Countess of Ormont—we 're cut to the quick.'

'We 're cut! Your quick, Charlotte, is known to court the knife.'

Letters of the morning's post were brought in.

The earl turned over a couple and took up a third, saying: 'I 'll attend to you in two minutes'; and thinking once more: Queer world it is, where, when you sheath the sword, you have to be at play with bodkins!

Lady Charlotte gazed on the carpet, effervescent with retorts to his last observation, rightly conjecturing that the letter he selected to read was from 'his Aminta.'

The letter apparently was interesting, or it was of inordinate length. He seemed still to be reading. He reverted to the first page.

At the sound of the paper, she discarded her cogitations and glanced up. His countenance had become stony. He read on some way, with a sudden drop on the signature, a recommencement, a sound in the throat, as when men grasp a comprehensible sentence of a muddled rigmarole and begin to have hopes of the remainder. But the eye on the page is not the eye which reads.

'No bad news, Rowsley?'

The earl's breath fell heavily.

Lady Charlotte left her chair, and walked about the room.

'Rowsley, I 'd like to hear if I can be of use.'

'Ma'am?' he said; and pondered on the word 'use,' staring at her.

'I don't intend to pry. I can't see my brother look like that, and not ask.'

The letter was tossed on the table to her.

She read these lines, dated from Felixstowe:

'My dear Lord,

'The courage I have long been wanting in has come at last, to break a tie that I have seen too clearly was a burden on you from the beginning. I will believe that I am chiefly responsible for inducing you to contract it. The alliance with an inexperienced girl of inferior birth, and a perhaps immoderate ambition, has taxed your generosity; and though the store may be inexhaustible, it is not truly the married state when a wife subjects the husband to such a trial. The release is yours, the sadness is for me. I have latterly seen or suspected a design on your part to meet my former wishes for a public recognition of the wife of Lord Ormont. Let me now say that these foolish wishes no longer exist. I rejoice to think that my staying or going will be alike unknown to the world. I have the means of a livelihood, in a modest way, and shall trouble no one.

'I have said, the sadness is for me. That is truth. But I have to add, that I, too, am sensible of the release. My confession of a change of feeling to you as a wife, writes the close of all relations between us. I am among the dead for you; and it is a relief to me to reflect on the little pain I give . . .'

'Has she something on her conscience about that man Morsfield?' Lady Charlotte cried.

Lord Ormont's prolonged Ah! of execration rolled her to a bundle.

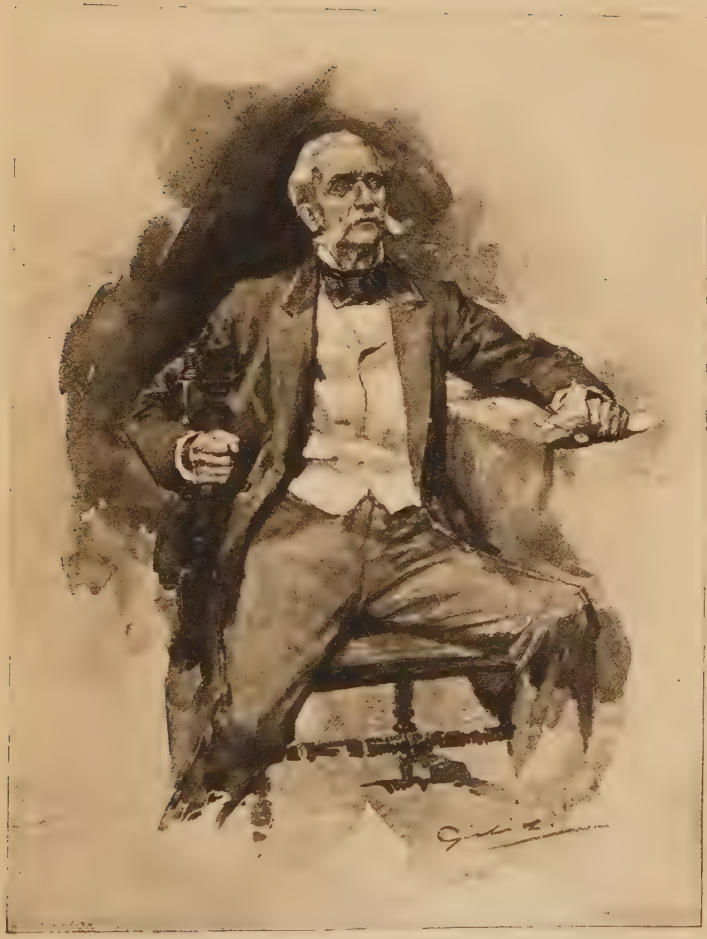
Nevertheless her human nature and her knowledge of woman's, would out with the words: 'There 's a man!'

She allowed her brother to be correct in repudiating the name of the dead Morsfield—chivalrous as he was on this Aminta's behalf to the last!—and struck along several heads, Adderwood's, Weyburn's, Randeller's, for the response to her suspicion. A man there certainly was. He would be probably a young man. He would not necessarily be a handsome man . . . or a titled or a wealthy man. She might have set eyes on a gypsy somewhere round Great Marlow—blood to blood; such things have been. Imagining a wildish man for her, rather than a handsome one and one devoted staidly to the founding of a school, she overlooked Weyburn, or reserved him with others for subsequent speculation.

The remainder of Aminta's letter referred to her delivery of the Ormont jewel-case at Lord Ormont's London house, under charge of her maid Carstairs. The affairs of the household were stated very succinctly, the drawer for labelled keys, whatever pertained to her management, in London or at Great Marlow.

'She 's cool,' Lady Charlotte said, after reading out the orderly array of items, in a tone of rasping irony, to convince her brother he was well rid of a heartless wench.

Aminta's written statement of those items were stabs at the home she had given him, a flashed picture of his loss. Nothing written by her touched him to pierce him so shrewdly; nothing could have brought him so closely the breathing image in the flesh of the woman now a phantom for him.



"Will that forked tongue cease hissing?" CHAP. 29

'Will she be expecting you to answer, Rowsley?'

'Will that forked tongue cease hissing!' he shouted, in the agony of a strong man convulsed both to render and conceal the terrible, shameful, unexampled gush of tears.

Lady Charlotte beheld her bleeding giant. She would rather have seen the brother of her love grimace in woman's manner than let loose those rolling big drops down the face of a rock. The big sob shook him, and she was shaken to the dust by the sight. Now she was advised by her deep affection for her brother to sit patient and dumb, behind shaded eyes: praising in her heart the incomparable force of the man's love of the woman contrasted with the puling inclinations of the woman for the man.

Neither opened mouth when they separated. She pressed and kissed a large nerveless hand. Lord Ormont stood up to bow her forth. His ruddied skin had gone to pallor resembling the berg of ice on the edge of Arctic seas, when sunlight has fallen away from it.

CHAPTER XXX

CONCLUSION

The peaceful little home on the solitary sandy shore was assailed, unwarned, beneath a quiet sky, some hours later, by a whirlwind, a dust-storm, and rattling volleys. Miss Vincent's discovery, in the past school-days, of Selina Collett's 'wicked complicity in a clandestine correspondence' had memorably chastened the girl, who vowed at the time when her schoolmistress, using the rod of Johnsonian English for the purpose, exposed the

depravity of her sinfulness, that she would never again be guilty of a like offence. Her dear and lovely Countess of Ormont, for whom she then uncomplainingly suffered, who deigned now to call her friend, had spoken the kind good-bye, and left the house after Mr. Weyburn's departure that same day; she, of course, to post by Harwich to London; he to sail by packet from the port of Harwich for Flushing. The card of an unknown lady, a great lady, the Lady Charlotte Eglett, was handed to her mother at eight o'clock in the evening.

Lady Charlotte was introduced to the innocent country couple; the mother knitting, the daughter studying a book of the botany of the Swiss Alps, dreaming a distant day's journey over historic lands of various hues to the unimaginable spectacle of earth's grandeur. Her visit lasted fifteen minutes. From the moment of her entry, the room was in such turmoil as may be seen where a water-mill wheel's paddles are suddenly set rounding to pour streams of foam on the smooth pool below. A relentless catechism bewildered their hearing. Mrs. Collett attempted an opposition of dignity to those vehement attacks for answers. It was flooded and rolled over. She was put upon her honour to reply positively to positive questions: whether the Countess of Ormont was in this house at present; whether the Countess of Ormont left the house alone or in company; whether a gentleman had come to the house during the stay of the Countess of Ormont; whether Lady Ormont had left the neighbourhood; the exact time of the day when she quitted the house, and the stated point of her destination.

Ultimately, protesting that they were incapable of telling what they did not know—which Lady Charlotte heard with an incredulous shrug—they related piecemeal what they did know, and Weyburn's name gave her

scent. She paid small heed to the tale of Mr. Weyburn's having come there in the character of young Mr. Collett's old schoolmate. Mr. Weyburn had started for the port of Harwich. This day, and not long subsequently, Lady Ormont had started for the port of Harwich, on her way to London, if we like to think it. Further corroboration was quite superfluous.

'Is there a night packet-boat from this port of yours?' Lady Charlotte asked.

The household servants had to be consulted; and she, hurriedly craving the excuse of their tedious mistress, elicited, as far as she could understand them, that there might be and very nearly was, a night packet-boat starting for Flushing. The cook, a native of Harwich, sent up word of a night packet-boat starting at about eleven o'clock last year.

Lady Charlotte saw the chance as a wind-blown beacon-fire under press of shades. Changeing her hawkish manner toward the simple pair, she gave them view of a smile magical by contrast, really beautiful—the smile she had in reserve for serviceable persons whom she trusted—while thanking them and saying, that her anxiety concerned Lady Ormont's welfare.

Her brother had prophesied she would soon be 'running at his wife's heels,' and so she was; but not 'with her head off,' as she had rejoined. She might prove, by intercepting his Aminta, that her head was on. The windy beacon-fire of a chance blazed at the rapid rolling of her carriage-wheels, and sank to stifling smoke at any petty obstruction. Let her but come to an interview with his Aminta, she would stop all that nonsense of the woman's letter; carry her off—and her Weyburn plucking at her other hand to keep her. Why, naturally, treated as she was by Rowsley, she dropped soft eyes on a good-looking secretary. Any woman would—

confound the young fellow! But all 's right yet if we get to Harwich in time; unless . . . as a certain cold-fish finale tone of the letter playing on the old string, the irrevocable, peculiar to women who are novices in situations of the kind, appeared to indicate; they see in their conscience-blasted minds a barrier to a return home, high as the Archangelical gate behind Mother Eve, and they are down on their knees blubbering gratitude and repentance if the gate swings open to them. It is just the instant, granting the catastrophe, to have a woman back to her duty. She has only to learn she has a magnanimous husband. If she learns into the bargain how he suffers, how he loves her,—well, she despises a man like that Lawrence Finchley all the more for the 'magnanimity' she has the profit of, and perceives to be feebleness. But there 's woman in her good and her bad; she 'll trick a man of age, and if he forgives her, owning his own faults in the case, she won't scorn him for it; the likelihood is, she 'll feel bound in honour to serve him faithfully for the rest of their wedded days.

A sketch to her of Rowsley's deep love. . . . Lady Charlotte wandered into an amazement at it. A sentence of her brother's recent speaking danced in her recollection. He said of his country: *That Lout comes to a knowledge of his wants too late.* True, Old England is always louting to the rear, and has to be pricked in the rear and pulled by the neck before she 's equal to the circumstances around her. But what if his words were flung at him in turn! Short of 'Lout,' it rang correctly. 'Too late,' we hope to clip from the end of the sentence likewise. We have then, if you stress it—'*comes to a knowledge of his wants*';—a fair example of the creatures men are; the greatest of men; who have to learn from the loss of the woman—or a fear of the loss—how much they really do love her.

Well, and she may learn the same or something sufficiently like it, if she 's caught in time, called to her face, Countess of Ormont, sister-in-law, and smoothed, petted, made believe she 's now understood and won't be questioned on a single particular—in fact, she marches back in a sort of triumph; and all the past in a cupboard, locked up, without further inquiry.

Her brother Rowsley's revealed human appearance of the stricken man—stricken right into his big heart—precipitated Lady Charlotte's reflections and urged her to an unavailing fever of haste during the circuitous drive in moonlight to the port. She alighted at the principal inn, and was there informed that the packet-boat, with a favouring breeze and tide, had started ten minutes earlier. She summoned the landlord, and described a lady, as probably one of the passengers: 'Dark, holds herself up high. Some such lady had dined at the inn on tea, and gone aboard the boat soon after.

Lady Charlotte burned with the question: Alone? She repressed her feminine hunger and asked to see the book of visitors. But the lady had not slept at the inn, so had not been requested to write her name.

The track of the vessel could be seen from the pier, on the line of a bar of moonlight; and thinking, that the abominable woman, if aboard she was, had coolly provided herself with a continental passport—or had it done for two by her accomplice, that Weyburn, before she left London—Lady Charlotte sent a loathing gaze at the black figure of the boat on the water, untroubled by any reminder of her share in the conspiracy of events, which was to be her brother's chastisement to his end.

Years are the teachers of the great rocky natures, whom they round and sap and pierce in caverns, having them on all sides, and striking deep inward at moments. There is no resisting the years, if we have a heart, and

a common understanding. They constitute, in the sum of them, the self-examination, whence issues, acknowledged or not, a belated self-knowledge, to direct our final actions. She had the heart. Sight of the high-minded, proud, speechless man suffering for the absence of a runaway woman, not ceasing to suffer, never blaming the woman, and consequently, it could be fancied, blaming himself, broke down Lady Charlotte's defences and moved her to review her part in her brother Rowsley's unhappiness. For supposing him to blame himself, her power to cast a shadow of blame on him went from her, and therewith her vindication of her conduct. He lived at Olmer. She read him by degrees, as those who have become absolutely tongueless have to be read; and so she gathered that this mortally (or lastingly) wounded brother of hers was pleased by an allusion to his Aminta. He ran his finger on the lines of a map of Spain, from Barcelona over to Granada; and impressed his nail at a point appearing to be mountainous or woody. Lady Charlotte suggested that he and his Aminta had passed by there. He told a story of a carriage accident: added, 'She was very brave.' One day, when he had taken a keepsake book of England's Beauties off the drawing-room table, his eyes dwelt on a face awhile, and he handed it, with a nod, followed by a slight depreciatory shrug.

'Like her, not so handsome,' Lady Charlotte said.

He nodded again. She came to a knowledge of Aminta's favourite colours through the dwelling of his look on orange and black, deepest rose, light yellow, light blue. Her grand-daughters won the satisfied look if they wore a combination touching his memory. The rocky are not imaginative, and have to be struck from without for a kindling of them. Submissive though she was to court and soothe her brother Rowsley, a spur of jealousy burned in the composition of her sentiments,

to set her going. He liked visiting Mrs. Lawrence Finchley at her effaced good man's country seat, Brockholm in Berkshire, and would stay there a month at a time. Lady Charlotte learnt why. The enthusiast for Aminta, without upholding her to her late lord, whom she liked well, talked of her openly with him, confessed to a fondness for her. How much Mrs. Lawrence ventured to say, Lady Charlotte could not know. But rivalry pushed her to the extreme of making Aminta partially a topic; and so ready was he to follow her lead in the veriest trifles recalling the handsome runaway, that she had to excite his racy diatribes against the burgess English and the pulp they have made of a glorious nation, in order not to think him inclining upon dotage.

Philippa's occasional scoff in fun concerning 'grandmama's tutor,' hurt Lady Charlotte for more reasons than one, notwithstanding the justification of her forethoughtfulness. The girl, however, was privileged; she was Bobby Benlew's dearest friend, and my lord loved the boy; with whom nothing could be done at school, nor could a tutor at Olmer control him. In fine, Bobby saddened the family and gained the earl's anxious affection by giving daily proofs of his being an Ormont in a weak frame; patently an Ormont, recurrently an invalid. His moral qualities hurled him on his physical deficiencies. The local doctor and Dr. Rewkes banished him twice to the seashore, where he began to bloom the first week and sickened the next, for want of playfellows, jolly fights and friendships. Ultimately they prescribed mountain air, Swiss air, easy travelling to Switzerland, and several weeks of excursions at the foot of the Alps. Bobby might possibly get an aged tutor, or find an English clergyman taking pupils, on the way.

Thus it happened, that seven years after his bereavement, Lord Ormont and Philippa and Bobby were on the

famous Bernese Terrace, grandest of terrestrial theatres where soul of man has fronting him earth's utmost majesty. Sublime: but five minutes of it fetched sounds as of a plug in an empty phial from Bobby's bosom, and his heels became electrical.

He was observed at play with a gentleman of Italian complexion. Past guessing how it had come about, for the gentleman was an utter stranger. He had at any rate the tongue of an Englishman. He had the style, too, the slang and cries and tricks of an English schoolboy, though visibly a foreigner. And he had the art of throwing his heart into that bit of improvised game, or he would never have got hold of Bobby, shrewd to read a masker.

Lugged-up by the boy to my lord and the young lady, he doffed and bowed. 'Forgive me, pray,' he said; 'I can't see an English boy without having a spin with him; and I make so bold as to speak to English people wherever I meet them, if they give me the chance. Bad manners? Better than that. You are of the military profession, sir, I see. I am a soldier, fresh from Monte Video. Italian, it is evident, under an Italian chief there. A clerk on a stool, and *hey presto* plunged into the war a month after, shouldering a gun and marching. Fifteen battles in eighteen months; and Death a lady at a balcony we kiss hands to on the march below. Not a bit more terrible! Ah, but your pardon, sir,' he hastened to say, observing rigidity on the features of the English gentleman; 'would I boast? Not I. Accept it as my preface for why I am moved to speak the English wherever I meet them:—Uruguay, Buenos Ayres, La Plata, or Europe. I cannot resist it. At least,' he bent gracefully, 'I do not. We come to the grounds of my misbehaviour. I have shown at every call I fear nothing, kiss hand of welcome or adieu to Death. And I, a boy

of the age of this youngster—he 's not like me, I can declare!—I was a sneak and a coward. It follows, I was a liar and a traitor. Who cured me of that vileness, that scandal? I will tell you—an Englishman and an Englishwoman: my schoolmaster and his wife. My schoolmaster—my friend! He is the comrade of his boys: English, French, Germans, Italians, a Spaniard in my time—a South American I have sent him—two from Boston, Massachusetts—and clever!—all emulous to excel, none boasting. But, to myself; I was that mean fellow. I did—I could let you know: before this young lady—she would wither me with her scorn. Enough, I sneaked, I lied. I let the blame fall on a schoolfellow and a housemaid. Oh! a small thing, but I coveted it—a scarf. It reminded me of Rome. Enough, there at the bottom of that pit, behold me. It was not discovered, but my schoolfellow was unpunished, the housemaid remained in service; I thought, I thought, and I thought until I could not look in my dear friend Matthew's face. He said to me one day: "Have you nothing to tell me, Giulio?" as if to ask the road to right or left. Out it all came. And no sermon, no! He set me the hardest task I could have. That was a penance!—to go to his wife, and tell it all to her. Then I did think it an easier thing to go and face death—and death had been my nightmare. I went, she listened, she took my hand: she said: "You will never do this again, I know, Giulio." She told me no English girl would ever look on a man who was a coward and lied. From that day I have made Truth my bride. And what the consequence? I know not fear! I could laugh, knowing I was to lie down in my six-foot measure to-morrow. If I have done my duty and look in the face of my dear Matthew and his wife! Ah, those two! They are loved. They will be loved all over Europe. He works for Europe and America

—all civilized people—to be one country. He is the comrade of his boys. Out of school hours, it is Christian names all round—Matthew, Emile, Adolf, Emilio, Giulio, Robert, Marcel, Franz, et cætera. Games or lessons, a boy can't help learning with him. He makes happy fellows and brave soldiers of them without drill. Sir, do I presume when I say I have your excuse for addressing you because you are his countryman? I drive to the old school in half an hour, and next week he and his dear wife and a good half of the boys will be on the tramp over the Simplon, by Lago Maggiore, to my uncle's house in Milan for a halt. I go to Matthew before I see my own people.'

He swept another bow of apology, chiefly to Philippa, as representative of the sex claiming homage.

Lord Ormont had not greatly relished certain of the flowery phrases employed by this young foreigner. 'Truth his bride,' was damnable: and if a story had to be told, he liked it plain, without jerks and evolutions. Many offences to our taste have to be overlooked in foreigners—Italians! considered, before they were proved in fire, a people classed by nature as operatic declaimers. Bobby had shown himself on the road out to Bern a difficult boy, and stupefyingly ignorant. My lord had two or three ideas working to cloudy combination in his head when he put a question, referring to the management of the dormitories at the school. Whereupon the young Italian introduced himself as Giulio Calliani, and proposed a drive to inspect the old school, with its cricket and football fields, lake for rowing and swimming, gymnastic fixtures, carpenter's shed, bowling alley, and four European languages in the air by turns daily; and the boys, too, all the boys rosy and jolly, according to the last report received of them from his friend Matthew.

Enthusiasm struck and tightened the loose chord of

scepticism in Lord Ormont; somewhat as if a dancing beggar had entered a kennel-dog's yard, designing to fascinate the faithful beast. It is a chord of one note, that is tightened to sound by the violent summons to accept, which is a provocation to deny. At the same time, the enthusiast's dance is rather funny; he is not an ordinary beggar; to see him trip himself in his dance would be rather funnier. This is to say, inspect the trumpeted school and retire politely. My lord knew the Bern of frequent visits: the woman was needed beside him to inspire a feeling for scenic mountains. Philippa's admiration of them was like a new-pressed grape-juice after a draught of the ripe vintage. Moreover, Bobby was difficult; the rejected of his English schools was a stiff Ormont at lessons, a wheezy Benlew in the playground: exactly the reverse of what should have been. A school of four languages in bracing air, if a school with healthy dormitories, and a school of the trained instincts we call gentlemanly, might suit Master Bobby for a trial. An eye on the boys of the school would see in a minute what stuff they were made of. Supposing this young Italianissimo with the English tongue to be tolerably near the mark, with a deduction of two-thirds of the enthusiasm, Bobby might stop at the school as long as his health held out, or the master would keep him. Supposing half a dozen things and more, the meeting with this Mr. Calliani was a lucky accident. But lucky accidents are anticipated only by fools.

Lord Ormont consented to visit the school. He handed his card and invited his guest; he had a carriage in waiting for the day, he said; and obedient to Lady Charlotte's injunctions, he withheld Philippa from the party. She and her maid were to pass the five hours of his absence in efforts to keep their monkey Bobby out of the well of the solicitious bears.

My lord left his carriage at the inn of the village lying below the school-house on a green height. The young enthusiast was dancing him into the condition of livid taciturnity, which could, if it would, flash out pungent epigrams of the actual world at Operatic recitative.

'There 's the old school-clock! Just in time for the half-hour before dinner,' said Calliani, chattering two hundred to the minute, of the habits and usages of the school, and how all had meals together, the master, his wife, the teachers, the boys. 'And she—as for her!' Calliani kissed finger up to the furthest skies: into which a self-respecting sober Northener of the Isles could imagine himself to kick enthusiastic gesticulators, if it were polite to do so.

The school-house faced the master's dwelling-house, and these, with a block of building, formed a three-sided enclosure, like barracks! Forth from the school-house door burst a dozen shouting lads, as wasps from the hole of their nest from a charge of powder. Out they poured whizzing; and the frog he leaped, and pussy ran and doubled before the hounds, and hockey-sticks waved, and away went a ball. Cracks at the ball anyhow, was the game for the twenty-five minutes breather before dinner.

'French day!' said Calliani, hearing their cries.

Then he bellowed 'Matthew!—Giulio!'

A lusty inversion of the order of the names and an Oberland jödel returned his hail. The school retreating caught up the Alpine cry in the distance. Here were lungs! Here were sprites!

Lord Ormont bethought him of the name of the master. 'Mr. Matthew, I think you said, sir,' he was observing to Calliani, as the master came nearer; and Calliani replied: 'His Christian name. But if

the boys are naughty boys, it is not the privilege. Mr. Weyburn.'

There was not any necessity to pronounce that name Calliani spoke it on the rush to his friend.

Lord Ormont and Weyburn advanced the steps to the meeting. Neither of them flinched in eye or limb.

At a corridor window of the dwelling-house a lady stood. Her colour was the last of a summer day over western seas; her thought: 'It has come!' Her mind was in her sight; her other powers were frozen.

The two men conversed. There was no gesture.

This is one of the lightning moments of life for the woman, at the meeting of the two men between whom her person has been in dispute, may still be; her soul being with one. And that one, dearer than the blood of her body, imperilled by her.

She could ask why she exists, if a question were in her grasp. She would ask for the meaning of the gift of beauty to the woman, making her desireable to those two men, making her a cause of strife, a thing of doom. An incessant clamour dinned about her: 'It has come!'

The two men walked conversing into the school-house. She was unconscious of the seeing of a third, though she saw and at the back of her mind believed she knew a friend in him. The two disappeared. She was insensible stone, except for the bell-clang: 'It has come'; until they were in view again, still conversing: and the first of her thought to stir from petrifaction was: 'Life holds no secret.'

She tried, in shame of the inanimate creature she had become, to force herself to think: and had, for a chastising result, a series of geometrical figures shooting across her brain, mystically expressive of the situation, not communicably. The most vivid and persistent was a

triangle. Interpret who may. The one beheld the two pass from view again, still conversing.

They are on the gravel; they bow; they separate. He of the grey head poised high has gone.

Her arm was pressed by a hand. Weyburn longed to enfold her, and she desired it, and her soul praised him for refraining. Both had that delicacy.

'You have seen, my darling,' Weyburn said. 'It has come, and we take our chance. He spoke not one word, beyond the affairs of the school. He has a grand-nephew in want of a school: visited the dormitories, refectory, and sheds: tasted the well-water, addressed me as Mr. Matthew. He had it from Giulio. Came to look at the school of Giulio's "friend Matthew": —you hear him. Giulio little imagines!—Well, dear love, we stand with a squad in front, and wait the word. It mayn't be spoken. We have counted long before that something like it was bound to happen. And you are brave. Ruin 's an empty word for us two.'

'Yes, dear, it is: we will pay what is asked of us,' Aminta said. 'It will be heavy, if the school . . . and I love our boys. I am fit to be the school-housekeeper; for nothing else.'

'I will go to the boys' parents. At the worst, we can march into new territory. Emile will stick to us. Adolf, too. The fresh flock will come.'

Aminta cried in the voice of tears: 'I love the old so!'

'The likelihood is, we shall hear nothing further.'

'You had to bear the shock, Matthew.'

'Whatever I bore, and you saw, you shared.'

'Yes,' she said.

'Mais, n'oublions pas que c'est aujourd'hui jour français; si, madame, vous avez assez d'appétit pour dîner avec nous?'

'Je suis, comme toujours, aux ordres de Monsieur.'

She was among the bravest of women. She had a full ounce of lead in her breast when she sat with the boys at their midday meal, showing them her familiar pleasant face.

Shortly after the hour of the evening meal, a messenger from Bern delivered a letter addressed to the Head-master. Weyburn and Aminta were strolling to the playground, thinking in common, as they usually did. They read the letter together. These were the lines:

'Lord Ormont desires to repeat his sense of obligation to Mr. Matthew for the inspection of the school under his charge, and will be thankful to Mr. Calliani, if that gentleman will do him the favour to call at his hotel at Bern to-morrow, at as early an hour as is convenient to him, for the purpose of making arrangements, agreeable to the Head-master's rules, for receiving his grand-nephew Robert Benlew as a pupil at the school.'

The two raised eyes on one another, pained in their deep joy by the religion of the restraint upon their hearts, to keep down the passion to embrace.

'I thank heaven we know him to be one of the true noble men,' said Aminta, now breathing, and thanking Lord Ormont for the free breath she drew.

Weyburn spoke of an idea he had gathered from the earl's manner. But he had not imagined the proud lord's great-heartedness would go so far as to trust him with the guardianship of the boy. That moved, and that humbled him, though it was far from humiliating.

Six months later, the brief communication arrived from Lady Charlotte:

'She is a widow.

'Unlikely you will hear from me again. Death is always next door, you said once. I look on the back of life.

'Tell Bobby, capital for him to write he has no longing for home holidays. If any one can make a man of him, you will. That I know.

'CHARLOTTE EGLETT.'

THE END

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